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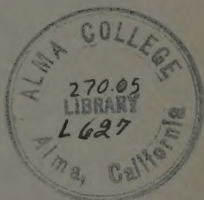
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The Saints Series

Saint Alphonsus Liguori

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By Baron J. Angot des Rotours



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CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION - - - - -	I
CHAPTER I	
VOCATION - - - - -	17
CHAPTER II	
CALL TO THE PRIESTHOOD - - -	48
CHAPTER III	
THE CONGREGATION OF THE REDEMPTORISTS -	69
CHAPTER IV	
THE BISHOP OF SANT' AGATA - - -	103
CHAPTER V	
TEACHING AND PIETY - - - - -	125
CHAPTER VI	
LAST TRIALS - - - - -	155
EPILOGUE - - - - -	169

ST. ALPHONSUS LIGUORI

INTRODUCTION

I

THE personality of St. Alphonsus Liguori is one that should appeal alike to the devout and to the student. Obviously the former will be attracted to this fervent apostle of the Blessed Sacrament, as revealed in his "Visits," and in his simple and tender devotion to the Immaculate Mother of God. On the other hand, looked at merely from a psychological point of view, it is impossible to ignore a Saint who, in the full tide of the eighteenth century, carries us back to the most fervent ages of Faith—the founder of an austere Congregation, and the only author, since St. Francis of Sales, raised by the Church to the rank of Doctor. And yet, in fact, his influence on the spiritual life, as well as his real character, are hardly realized, and that in spite of his many writings¹ and of numerous and lengthy biogra-

¹ In the fourth volume of the *Life of the Saint*, written by Cardinal Villecourt, we find a chronological list of his works which is particularly interesting. The general catalogue in the National Library may also be consulted. *Auteurs*, vol. ii (1899), pp. 563-641. Besides this, there was published in

phies,¹ beginning with the valuable memoirs of Tannoia,² his companion and disciple for forty years.

His name, at all events, is well known, for the frequent attacks³ made upon him have kept him

Rome (1902-1912), by the Vatican press, in four quarto volumes, an authorized edition of his *Moral Theology*, principally through the efforts of Pères Léonard Gaudé and Blanc.

¹ The following must be cited: Italian—*Giadini* (1815), *Rispoli* (1834), and *Cardinal Capecepatro*; this latter work has been translated into French by Abbé Le Monnier (2 vols., 1895). German: *Santrín Schepers* (1884), *Gisler Otto* (Einsiedlen, 1886), *Dilgskron* (2 vols., 1887), and *F. Meffert* (Mayence, 1901). French: *Abbé Jeancard* (1828), *Cardinal Villecourt* (4 vols., 1863), *L'Histoire de Saint Alphonse de Liguori*, with an introductory letter by Mgr. Dupanloup (1877), and finally *Saint Alphonse de Liguori*, by R. P. Berthe (2 vols., Paris, 1900). The latter, having been allowed to make use of the valuable archives of his Congregation, has been able to bring out a complete life of the Saint.

² Translated into French (3 vols., 1842). This work certainly gives us the best impression of St. Alphonsus, and a complete edition of it, together with his Letters, has just been published by R. P. Dumortier (5 vols., Lille, 1888-1893).

³ One scarcely likes to mention the deplorable passage in which Alexandre Dumas explains why he gives Liguori's baptismal name to a vile character in one of his plays; although M. René de Pont-Jest (*Revue du Palais*, 1^{er} Octobre, 1898) assures us that originally he had chosen another name, Jules, and that he only changed it for reasons of political prudence. How is it that he, amongst other charges against Alphonsus, attacks him for his devotion to our Lady? Did Dumas forget having once, in a moment of happier inspiration, offered homage to her who by a sublime miracle unites in herself the two sacred states of womanhood—virginity and maternity? "What touching grace," he says, "what daring flight of poetry, what powerful yet gracious majesty!

in public view. How often has he not been denounced as a casuist by those who attack the Church in the name of public morality. Both the Saint and his teachings have been the subject of orations in the Tribune of the French Chamber.¹ In England Protestants discover in his writings the material for their indictment of Popery.² In Germany,³ those who for the last two years have

An Eastern sky, a hovering Angel, a lily inclined, a maiden in prayer, and lo! the Saviour of the world, the Son of God is given to us."

¹ Chamber of Deputies, June 21 and July 5, 1879, and January 28, 1901.

² In 1864, in order to justify himself for casting suspicion on Newman's truthfulness, Kingsley quoted St. Alphonsus' teaching on equivocation. It is well known how the illustrious convert disconcerted his adversaries in his triumphant reply (*Apologia pro vita sua*).

³ M. Robert Grassman, anxious no doubt to give fresh vogue to Pascal's Provincial Letters, recently published at Stettin some extracts from the writings of Liguori which have been widely circulated in Germany, Switzerland, and Austria. In this latter country they were even laid before Parliament. Among the answers to these attacks we may cite an article by Lehmkuhl in the *Stimmen aus Maria Laach* of July, 1901, and a small work by Meyenberg, *Die Katholische Moral als angeklagte* (Stans, near Lucerne, 1901). Among the censors of Liguori's *Moral Theology* in Germany and Austria two have had to submit to legal proceedings. Grassman's book even became the subject of judicial process. Soon after the author's death his son brought an action against a Catholic journalist for severe criticisms of the work. M. Engelbert, Professor of the University of Vienna, was appointed to verify the correctness of the quotations from Liguori. He certainly could not be suspected of partiality towards Catholicism; but though he would not censure Grassman's work, he nevertheless declared it to be of no

been carrying on the campaign against Rome make of him their favourite butt. We shall be better able to estimate the worth of all these attacks and of this ill-will by studying his character and life-work.

St. Alphonsus, by his writings and his labours, forms part of the history of the Church, as being one of the chief forces in the fight against Jansenism. Here undoubtedly is a primary cause of the hostility so often shown him ; but it constitutes also one of his chief points of interest. For in this great polemic the subject of controversy was something far other than a subtle point of dogma, appealing only to theologians. No, what was at stake was nothing less fundamental than the whole range of our religious conceptions ; and the questions which agitate men's minds to-day are far more intimately connected with the Jansenist controversy than is commonly suspected. If we would duly appraise Liguori and the significance of his services to the Church, we must grasp the import of this.

II

To speak of Jansenism in these days is not to revive controversies long since dead, which do not

scientific value, for the translator had only given nine quotations correctly. And yet it is from this tainted source that M. Demblon, a Belgian socialist, drew the quotations which he insisted on reading to the Chamber of Deputies. Naturally M. Renkin, in his vigorous reply, treated the text as an imposture.

concern us. It is true that it interests few people whether the five propositions condemned by Innocent X in 1653 were actually, and with the meaning attached to them by the condemnation, to be found in the *Augustinus* of Jansenius. For aught we know, there are still remaining members of the sect founded by the Bishop of Ypres. But if we look at the general condition of modern thought, we shall find the traces of the harm done to the Catholic Church by those who, while attacking her with all the bitterness of traitors, strangely enough still professed themselves her children.

Among the influences most frequently tending to turn men from the Faith to-day, many must be laid to the charge of the Jansenists, either directly or indirectly as the result of an inevitable reaction. Without minimizing the importance of other causes, it is no paradox to assert that there is a good deal of Jansenism in modern irreligion. The story is told—and St. Alphonsus considers it opportune to make it known¹—that towards the close of the summer of 1621, at the Carthusian Priory of Bourg-Fontaine, in the forest of Villers-Cotterets, a secret meeting was held, and here Jansenius, Duvergier de Hauranne, Abbé de Saint-Cyran, Arnauld d'Andilly, and some others, formed a plot to substitute a more or less Christian Deism for the practices and discipline of the Catholic Church. They clearly

¹ Letter of January 6, 1766; and Tannoia, book iv, ch. xxxiv. On the meeting at Bourg-Fontaine, Sainte-Beuve (*Port-Royal*, vol. i, pp. 218, 295), and Abbé Maynard, *Les Provinciales et leur réfutation*, 1851, vol. ii, p. 215.

saw that their best hope of success lay in attacking the Sacraments most frequently in use—viz., Penance and the Holy Eucharist, “and that by indirect means.” They were to render them almost inaccessible “by representing grace to be of such importance and necessity that it alone was operative, to the destruction of free-will.” They resolved also to throw discredit on the forces opposed to this teaching—the Pope and the Church. Whether all these details are exact or not, there is probably some amount of truth in the history of a conspiracy formed about this time. And even those who treat the story as a Jesuitical fable are obliged to acknowledge that, in later times, events came to pass very much as though the Jansenists were carrying out the scheme attributed to them. For who has worked harder and succeeded better in estranging souls from the Sacraments? Saint-Cyran affirmed that to frequent them was often more harmful than profitable; and it was this same idea which inspired Antoine Arnauld—the great Arnauld—when in 1643 he published his celebrated work on frequent Communion.

Its success was so great that it has been compared to that of the *Introduction to the Devout Life*, and its result was perceptibly to diminish the number of Easter Communions. Many of the priests in Paris attested the fact, and in Saint-Sulpice alone there were three thousand fewer communicants. It is well known also that at Port-Royal pious souls used to abstain from Holy Communion for months, and sometimes even for

years. Nuns, such as the Mères Arnauld, boasted that they had not made their Easter Communion for three years. Priests after their conversion, so-called, would seem to have become laymen, and to forget that they had the power to say Mass. A custom grew up of not giving absolution for a considerable period after confession,¹ and often a whole series of confessions. Naturally, when such a spirit animated the clergy, the people in their charge soon began to deteriorate in the practices of the spiritual life. In Marseilles,² in the time of Mgr. de Belzunce, it was not uncommon to see First Communicants of twenty or thirty years of age. There is evidence that in the Diocese of Troyes, about this time, canonical penances were imposed upon children, depriving them of the Sacraments for eight or ten years; the First Communions usually made at the great feasts were abolished in nearly all the parishes; Easter Communions, especially in country places, almost ceased, and the custom spread of receiving the

¹ At the close of his life (*Port-Royal*, t. ii, p. 175) Arnauld boasted of having been the chief propagator of this custom in France. He remarked that the utility of this practice was unknown to St. Philip Neri, to Cardinal de Bérulle, and to Father de Condren. He says: "All that they did was, at the most, to refuse absolution to those who showed no wish to give up sin. To those who were willing to renounce it I strongly suspect that they did give absolution." But the author of *La Fréquente Communion* intended that the rule of delaying absolution be applied even when the sick person was in danger of death.

² *Mgr. de Belzunce et le Jansénisme*, by Abbé Jauffret, 1881.

Sacrament of Matrimony¹ without first going to Confession.

In the nineteenth century the same influences were at work, to produce the same results; the Jansenistic spirit paralyzed and blighted in various ways the revival of religion which took place everywhere after the horrors of the Revolution had passed away and liberty of worship was restored. "A penitent, even of regular and edifying life," writes Mgr. d'Hulst,² "had to return fifteen times successively to the Confessional before he received absolution. Some missionaries sent to revive the practice of religion in a parish received such restricted powers from the Bishop that they hardly dared begin preaching lest they should be powerless to absolve any but a few pious souls. Cardinal Guibert, when he was a young priest of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, was sent with one of his companions to give a mission near Barcelonnette; but the Bishop, Mgr. Miollis, imposed so many restrictions that reserved cases were innumerable; they included all sins of drunkenness and usury, any form of dancing, and in a general way all habitual relapse into grave fault. Penitents guilty on any of these heads were obliged to confess to the Bishop himself, and in order to do so had to undertake a journey through a mountainous district. Knowing this, it does not surprise

¹ *Supplément aux Nouvelles Ecclésiastiques*, quoted by Mgr. Ricard (*Les Premiers Jansénistes et Port-Royal*, 1883).

² "Religious Life in France in the Nineteenth Century," in *La France chrétienne devant l'histoire* (1896).

us that religion everywhere fell into decay, and abstention from the Sacraments, at first compulsory, little by little became voluntary." Catholics can estimate how much harm was done by closing to so many souls the sources of grace.

And now what was the fundamental principle of this strange warfare, waged in the name of pure Christianity, against the Sacraments, which seemed to be valued only when they had to be wrung from the clergy by decrees of the *Parlements*?

What is the connection between this spirit and that of Jansenism? What warrants our affirming that the one is the most evident mark and consequence of the other? The truth is that in the Jansenistic movement there lay a great deal more than mere reaction—such as inflamed Pascal—against superficial and external religion, against carelessness and laxity and absence of respect in the service of God. This school, so bitterly critical and stoically austere, treated the generality of men with disdain, and, developing a kind of secret pride, was reluctant to use the supernatural helps of which the Church is the established minister. Its followers were neither humble nor loving enough to accept with grateful eagerness the divine favours showered on mankind, nor to realize how useful it often is for conscience to be guided by that authority whose direction it has voluntarily accepted as coming from God. And, if we consider attentively, the outcome of all this ultimately was the principle that to accept any

external help and to admit the magisterium of the Church is immoral.

Here assuredly we have one of the fundamental ideas of modern irreligion.

Putting aside purely intellectual difficulties, the greatest obstacle which retards well-intentioned minds on the road to faith is apparently the refusal to believe that God loves us; and the Jansenists have much to answer for in this respect. Far from removing those difficulties which lead to doubt or even denial of Divine Providence, they made a point of exploiting and strengthening them. They were so far successful that, though few in number, they impressed their doctrines on that age of learned men. How is it that they did not fear the dangers to which they exposed the Faith? How did not they themselves shrink from their own presentment of an obdurate Deity? And how came it that the author of the *Pensées* did not grasp that his undertaking was paradoxical and impossible of realization, even by his acute intellect—viz., to prove Christianity from the heart, and yet make Christianity such as Jansenism made it? It matters not to us; but what we have to bear in mind is that the teaching of these gloomy theologians explains in great measure the reaction of Rousseau and of the eighteenth century, and such teaching still injures the religion it distorted.

What sort of God, in effect, does Jansenism propound to us? Certainly Our Lord, in their system, is to the few predestinate infinitely loving, tender, and gracious; but towards the rest of the

world, including the great majority of mankind, He is merciless. Listen to Pascal¹: "God hates and scorns all sinners in the mass, to the point that in the hour of their death, the hour of their uttermost wretchedness and misery, Divine Wisdom will add mockery and derision to the vengeful wrath which condemns them to eternal torment." And these sinners, have they really sinned wilfully? Had they in any true sense, without juggling with words, the liberty of escaping their unhappy fate? Simply not. In reality, if they have not risen above sin, it is because grace has been wanting to them, for grace is sovereignly efficacious, and is not given to everyone. Two of the propositions condemned in the *Augustinus* are perfectly lucid on this point. On the one hand, "No resistance in the state of fallen nature can ever be made to interior grace," and on the other, "Some commandments of God are impossible to just men, even when they wish and are striving to observe them with all the strength they have at the time; and they lack the grace which would render the observance possible." Liguori has good reason to affirm that such an idea is impious. "It makes God a tyrant and an unjust master, who commands men to do impossible things and condemns them for not carrying them out."²

The lamentable plight of mankind devised by these dreary theologians is sufficiently accounted for by the doctrine of original sin. For has not

¹ Eleventh Provincial Letter.

² *Triumph of the Church*, ch. xiii.

original sin vitiated our nature entirely? Do we not all deserve eternal punishment? This lot they assign unhesitatingly even to new-born babies dying without the chance of being baptized.¹

Pascal does not draw back even in such an extreme case. He writes in his *Pensées*: "Can anything be more diametrically opposed to our wretched idea of justice than to condemn to eternal punishment a child, incapable of willing, for a sin in which he seems to have had so slight a share that it was committed six thousand years before he was created? Assuredly nothing can be more shocking than such teaching, and yet without this mystery—the most incomprehensible of all mysteries—we are incomprehensible to ourselves." I do not know if this exposition of the doctrine of the Fall is needed to make us understand ourselves, but I am quite sure that it makes Almighty God more than incomprehensible, it makes Him impossible to love.

Without adding anything to the severity of its

¹ Liguori, on the contrary, has taken pains to declare that in his opinion, identical on this point with that of St. Thomas, these unbaptized infants are not admitted to the beatific vision, but at any rate they do not suffer any pain. Having explained this teaching in his book, *The Great Means of Prayer* (1759), he repeats it in his *Dissertations on the Four Last Things* (1776). On this occasion he incurred the criticism of the ecclesiastical censor, who attempted to make him change his text, and to show that St. Augustine authoritatively makes the opposite statement. Alphonsus refused, and on July 22, 1776, he wrote: "That would make me tell an untruth. I should state an opinion contrary to what I hold. I would rather lose my head than tell a lie."

dogmas, Catholicism is already too hard for many people, simply because it insists with unwavering firmness on the tremendous issues of our earthly probation, on human responsibility, on the heinousness of sin—because it insists on our accepting the profound mystery of evil and suffering without calling God in question, and trusting to Him for its ultimate solution—that mystery which often seems to press harder on souls in proportion as they grow in devotion and tenderness.

And yet the religion of Jesus Christ does not confine itself to this severe teaching. It gives us the strongest and most forcible reasons the world has ever known for believing in His divine love. But what becomes of those reasons when the *Augustinus* is made the measure of the Gospel of Christ? One finds sometimes an old crucifix with the arms extended upwards, and hardly open. Whether or no this is the inspiration of the Jansenists,¹ it symbolizes their doctrine that the Victim on Calvary did not die for all mankind. Such is the travesty they substitute for the true figure of Our Crucified God, His wounded arms wide open to call and to receive all who know themselves to be poor and sinful, all who suffer and who die.

III

Alphonsus Liguori stands out in the history of the Church as one of her greatest champions, whose providential work it was to save her from

¹ M. A. Gazier denies this in the *Revue de l'Art Chrétien*, 1910.

deadly and paralyzing infection, and who, in the words of Pius IX,¹ when he proclaimed him a Doctor of the Church, was to be the destroyer of Jansenism. It is worth while pausing, therefore, that we may study with sympathy such an arresting personality. His was a tender yet strong heart, loving and readily loved in return, seeming to have won, through bitter sorrow, the power to console and strengthen others, a heart filled with anguish and yet ever expanding with deeper love; for this is the way of the Saints.

Yet be it remembered that the life of a Saint does not appeal to everybody. When heart and conscience slumber, when pride and selfishness are paramount, and the attraction of the senses is strong, then a Saint's life ceases to have any meaning. Far from causing edification, it will be more inclined to shock us, for spiritual heroism is often disconcerting to a mind not attuned to the supernatural.

Let us also be on our guard against expecting of every canonized Saint an absolute perfection, such as will completely satisfy our highest ideal, and leave nothing to regret, nothing to criticize. Only of Our Lord can it be said: "He did all things well," and only in Him can the fulness of the Catholic ideal be found. The greatest of His servants is but a partial reflection of the Divine Model. Liguori himself said: "The lives of the Saints would be much longer if their writers told us their failings as well as their virtues." This

¹ *Breve Doctoratus*, July 7, 1871.

remark is worth remembering, although in the long life of its author it is difficult to discover real faults. At all events, it shows us that it would be wrong to consider ourselves bound to extol him and propose him as an example in everything—ideas, actions, methods, tastes, character—without reserve or discernment. For though in proclaiming him a Doctor the Church allows us to follow his teaching with a safe conscience, she has not conferred on him a patent of infallibility—any more than she requires us to believe the truth of miracles¹ attributed to the Saints in their canonization. Neither need we fear to lessen their glory by studying them with careful attention and a freedom quite compatible with veneration. The more we find them to be men, such as ourselves,

¹ The duty of the faithful, writes Mgr. d'Hulst, with his habitual precision, consists simply in acknowledging the canonized person as a true and holy disciple of Our Redeemer. The Church does not go so far as to force us to admit as authentic those miracles—rigidly examined though they be—which the process of canonization requires (*La France chrétienne devant l'histoire*, 1896, p. 637). See, on the same subject, *La Question du Surnaturel*, by Père Matignon (1861, p. 385). It has also been justly remarked in a book of deep and sound spirituality (*La vie spirituelle et l'oraison*, Solesmes, 1899) that an exaggerated emphasis of such supernatural events as ecstasies, raptures, and similar states found in the lives of the Saints, leads to illusion, because to dwell on these supernatural things sometimes gives rise to them. For this reason this life of St. Alphonsus Liguori does not deal at length with the marvels related by some of his biographers with a fulness of detail and a relish open to criticism. Each one, according to his taste, may accept them more or less, but to reject them wholesale would be temerarious.

subject to the impress of their surroundings, with angularities of character, almost inevitably falling short on some point, so much the more do we feel nearer to them, and so much the more do their lofty virtues impress us.

Those are to be pitied who show themselves incapable of appreciating the greatness and beauty exhibited in the life of St. Alphonsus Liguori, or who turn away from it on the pretext that they do not find in it all they look for, or that certain details displease them. There are some things which the moral law forbids us to sneer at—nay, it proclaims that it is a grace to be allowed a glimpse of them. And can we Catholics doubt that this great servant of the Church, perhaps the greatest of the eighteenth century, was sent to strengthen our weak faith, our feeble piety? God does not send us His Saints without a purpose.

CHAPTER I

VOCATION

I

THE Saints, like other people, can only be known in their own setting; and, in the case of St. Alphonsus more than in that of others, we shall never succeed in forming a correct estimate if we lose sight of the fact that the whole of his long life was passed in the eighteenth century, and in the Kingdom of Naples. It is worth while seeking to distinguish between what proceeds from his own personality, on the one hand, and what he owes to the influence of his surroundings on the other. It is necessary for us to know what contradictions, what bitterness affected his impressionable nature, what sorrows wounded his generous heart. Only thus can we grasp his real individuality and the whole compass of his mission.

In the time of St. Alphonsus Italy had completely lost that supremacy which the activity of her merchants, the success of her artists and writers, and the glory of her Saints, had won for her in the past. Monuments and memories now alone remained to tell of the wonderful growth of

her cities in the dawn of the Middle Ages, and of the brilliance of her principalities amid the corruption of the Renaissance. Little was now added to the inheritance of the past. Can the names of Maffei (1675-1755), Goldoni (1707-1793), and Metastasio (1698-1782), compare with those of Dante and Petrarch? Nor were industry and material prosperity in much better condition. As a result of the maritime discoveries in the beginning of the eighteenth century, the old trade routes had been abandoned, to the serious loss of the Mediterranean harbours. Moreover, while the neighbouring Powers had accomplished the process of their own unification, Italy's various provinces had been capriciously divided, and thereby impoverished, some by internal discord, and others by foreign occupation. Meantime, since the final establishment of the Spanish dominion by the Treaty of Cambrai (1559),¹ some sort of tranquillity had reigned.

But trouble, caused by the Wars of the Spanish and Austrian Succession, broke out anew in the first half of the eighteenth century, and brought fresh changes in the distribution of kingdoms. By the Treaty of Utrecht (1713) the Dukes of Savoy obtained possession of Sicily, with the title of King, but in 1720 they exchanged that island for Sardinia, and by the Treaties of Vienna (1738) and Aix-la-Chapelle (1774) they still further extended the limits of the kingdom in the valley of the Po.

¹ At the conclusion of this treaty it could be said: "The Spaniards nibble in Sicily, eat in Naples, and devour in Lombardy."

The possession of Naples and Milan had been confirmed to Austria by the Treaty of Rastadt (1714), and in 1735 she secured Tuscany for the younger branches of the Hapsburgs, without waiting for the death of the last Medici. From another side Elizabeth Farnese, daughter of the Duke of Parma, and second wife of Philip V of Spain, succeeded in providing for her eldest son, Charles, the throne of Naples, and for her younger son, Philip, the Duchies of Parma and Piacenza (1748). Then followed a time of peace lasting till the appearance of the French armies in 1792, during which period a certain reawakening of intellectual activity and anxiety for reform manifested itself.

We must try to picture to ourselves the state of Naples when the Viceroy of Charles II and Philip II were succeeded by those of Austria, and finally by the Spanish Bourbons, who retained the throne of the Two Sicilies till 1860. This animated city, the most populous in the whole Peninsula,¹ gave the impression of being a real capital.² And, after all, might not this have come to pass, did not circumstances seem to demand, that she should become the centre of United Italy? Her history was an ancient one. The Norman Princes had chosen her as the seat of royalty in the twelfth

¹ Antonio Parrino, in his *Nuova Guida per Napoli* (1725), gives the number of inhabitants as five hundred thousand to six hundred thousand. This is about twice the number given by de Brosses (*Lettres d'Italie*, 1739); but the three hundred and fifty thousand of M. de Landes in his *Voyage d'un Français en Italie* in 1765 and 1766 seems nearer the truth.

² See de Brosses, *Lettres écrites d'Italie en 1739 et 1740*.

century, after winning for themselves large territories from Greeks, Lombards, and Saracens. In her University, founded by the Emperor Frederic in 1224, St. Thomas Aquinas had taught. She had seen the houses of Arragon and Anjou pass away, and had been the prize in the struggles between the Kings of France and Spain. Even when subjected to a long foreign dominion, after the expedition of Gonzalo de Cordova (1503), Naples still retained her prestige. It was within her walls that Campanella, the daring Calabrian monk, published, in 1591, his *Philosophia sensibus demonstrata*. It was a Neapolitan, Marini (1569-1625), the most celebrated author in Italy, who composed *Adonis*, a poem of forty-five thousand lines, in honour of Mary de Medicis, of which the bad taste influenced even the pulpit.

Neither Salvator Rosa (1615-1675), the friend of Masaniello, nor Luca Giordano were inferior artists. The great city had, moreover, wonderful natural advantages, with its magnificent harbour and lovely bay curving from Posilippo to Vesuvius. Adjoining Sorrento, Capri rises from the blue waters, and Sant' Elmo and the monastery of San Martino dominate the whole circling bay, whilst on the shore are the Castel d'Uovo and the Castello Nuovo, the palace built for the Spanish Viceroy¹ in the seventeenth century. The houses

¹ It is a fair question whether rulers of essentially Latin race should be called strangers, and whether the government of the Viceroy was as oppressive and ruinous as is alleged. Many of the Governors grew to love the country committed

with their flat roofs, and the numerous churches bathed in the splendour of brilliant sunshine, all help to enhance the beauty of the scene. The society which disported itself in this setting was brilliant enough in appearance; this was specially so since the departure of the Spanish Viceroy, who had incurred the reproach of imposing severe sumptuary laws, and had insisted on a depressing gloom in dress and liveries.¹ Such severity was particularly obnoxious to the Neapolitans, whose love of external show and display is mentioned by all travellers; and no doubt the prospect of the relaxation of these laws, and the promise to maintain ancient privileges and distribute new titles, gained many partisans to Austria from among the nobles. None the less, the same nobles hastened to rally round the Spanish Bourbons when they secured the power, and those legitimists who at first refused to forsake their convictions were soon won over.

Besides, the city was proud to be the capital of an independent kingdom, to have a King of her own and a Court with all its formality. To cut a fine figure there now became the principal occupation of the aristocracy (they had little else to do), and

to their charge, and marked their stay there by improvements and works of utility. The famous Via Toledo, now the Via Roma, which crosses the city almost from north to south, was the work in the sixteenth century of Don Pedro de Toledo, father of the too famous Duke of Alva.

¹ Journey in Italy made by Maximilien Misson at the close of the sixteenth century.

these high pretensions and lordly airs consoled them when they could not always succeed in making much of a show. But behind all this outward parade deep misery lay hidden. Large portions of the country, especially in the south, were poorly cultivated and but sparsely inhabited, and famine was of frequent occurrence. The city of Naples alone contained forty thousand beggars¹ and indigent people, the *lazzaroni*, who might be seen each morning crowding the stairs and piazza of Monte Oliveto—a spectacle hideous enough to make one sick, says the President de Brosses. Even among those who made a show of wealth there was often more glitter than reality. There is a story told of seven young Neapolitan nobles who were much admired for their grand attire, but they could only appear one at a time, as the same costume had to serve for all.² This love of display was still to be found among the nobility at the end of the eighteenth century; they were bad at paying, and “in spite of sumptuous appointments and fine palaces, were often in want of real necessities. You may see one preceded by four footmen, waited on by forty servants, with fifty horses in the stables, whose major-domo is often put to it to find the wherewithal for dinner.”³ This desire for effect and display betrayed itself even in their speech. Politeness exceeded the ordinary limits, without

¹ *Travels of a Frenchman.*

² *A Parisian in Rome and in Naples in 1632*, by L. Marcheix (1897).

³ Abbé de Saint-Non, 1781: *Picturesque Journeys round Naples.*

being any the more sincere; everything was in the superlative. Barristers were not content to plead their causes with warmth—they became bombastic. “The style of writers is too far fetched, and those who dispute shout so loudly and threaten one another so fiercely that you tremble for their lives; but usually nothing happens.”¹ To this grandiloquent temperament, always ready with high-sounding protestations and declamations, never able to express itself simply or concisely, must be added a listless indolence, the consequence alike of the hot climate and the arbitrary methods of government.

The country had the reputation of being religious. Both secular and regular priests were numerous²; the Catholic Faith was officially professed and protected, without troubling itself about what nowadays we call liberty of conscience. Bishops demanded and obtained the intervention of secular force to put an end to scandals and irregularities pointed out to them by the parish priests. These, in their turn, were empowered to demand from their parishioners certificates of their Easter Communion, and sentence of excommunication was published against defaulters. Such method of government could not be suspected of harmful liberalism, and yet it did not show very gratifying results. On the other hand, religious processions were celebrated in the streets with a pomp and

¹ *Travels of a Frenchman.*

² According to P. Berthe, they numbered about one hundred and fifty thousand.

frequency not seen elsewhere. One of the most celebrated was on September 8 to the shrine of Our Lady of Piedigrotta, at the foot of Posilippo, in which figured the King and the most brilliant of his army. This feast was held in such esteem that in country places women would sometimes include in their marriage contract a stipulation to be taken to see it. The people delighted in ceremonies of this kind; they loved gorgeous processions and richly decorated altars, and the different confraternities and trade guilds vied with each other in this respect. Statues of Our Lady abounded in streets and country roads, and Calabrians would gather round them to sing their *laudi*, whilst on Christmas night they showed their joy by fireworks.¹ There was scarcely a house but had its Crib, some of these real works of art.² Strangers were impressed by the richness of the churches, with their costly hangings and lovely flowers, the profusion of their marbles and precious stones, especially on the tabernacles, and the numerous relics, some of them, like the blood of St. Januarius, celebrated as miraculous. But this demonstrative devotion and love of display, graceful indeed and sincere as it often was, did in some measure deserve the reproach bestowed on it by a French traveller who found it superficial and fruitless of real effect. St. Alphonsus tells us that in many convents the

¹ Abbé de Saint-Non, *loc. cit.*

² At an exhibition of everything connected with childhood held in Paris in June, 1901, visitors were shown the Crib which had been made for King Charles III, 1750.

majority of the nuns had been forced by their parents to enter, without a real vocation.¹ He asserts, too, that many, if not all, the secular priests forgot what they had learned, for after their ordination they seldom opened a book, and, unhappily, it was no rare thing to see them leading lives far from edifying. Morals of society were also lax, though the fashion of married ladies having a *gallant* attached to their service was less common around Naples than in other parts of the country.

It is easy to understand how the difficulties arising from such social conditions were aggravated by the general progress of irreligion in the eighteenth century. In the group of distinguished men² to be found in Naples many were hostile to Rome. The civil history of the kingdom of Naples, published by Pietro Gianonne in 1724, was condemned by the Holy See. The spread of French ideas and publications, and the influence of a Bourbon Court, were scarcely favourable to religion. Already, in 1753, St. Alphonsus trembled at the number of atheists to be found in the capital. The Prime Minister of that time, Marchese Tanucci, the real ruler of the Two Sicilies during

¹ *Useful Reflections for Bishops.*

² Amongst these the most prominent is John Baptist Vico (though scarcely known till after his death), besides the learned ecclesiastics Canon Mazocchi, well versed in Oriental languages; Père de la Torre, skilled in natural science; and the Abbé Galiani, uncle of the author of *Dialogues sur le commerce des grains*, one of the really brilliant men in the country, according to de Brosses.

the minority of Ferdinand IV, already showed signs of what was later known as Josephism. He, Voltaire, and Pombal were born within five years of each other, and from that time the mutterings of infidelity, which had already rent the heart of Fénelon,¹ grew louder and louder. The great attack on the Church foretold by Bossuet² was no longer confined to Cartesianism. She was now being stormed by the growing pride of men of letters, by the jealous claim of civil power, and the contagion of lax morals; whilst her inner life was sapped by the destructive influence of Jansenism. She had need indeed of Saints.³

¹ Sermon for the Epiphany, 1685.

² Letter to a pupil of Père Malebranche, May 21, 1687.

³ And they were not lacking. The Jesuit, St. Francis Jerome, was the glory of Naples till 1716. Northern Italy had St. Leonard of Port-Maurice (1676-1751) and St. Paul of the Cross (1694-1744), founder of the Passionists. In France the mendicant Benedict Joseph Labre (1748-1783) and Madame Louise of France, daughter of Louis XV (1737-1784) were offering up works of expiation. And the Holy See was filled by many celebrated Pontiffs: Innocent XII (1691-1700); Clement XI (1700-1721), author of the celebrated *Unigenitus* (September 8, 1713); Innocent XIII (1721-1724); Benedict XIII (1724-1730); Clement XII (1730-1740); Benedict XIV (1740-1758), a Pope as learned as he was holy; Clement XIII (1758-1769), who gave his approbation to the devotion to the Sacred Heart; Clement XIV (1769-1774), from whom was wrested the suppression of the Society of Jesus (June 21, 1773); and Pius VI (1774-1799), who died at Valence a prisoner of the French Republic.

II

On September 27, 1696, a son was born to Marchese Giuseppe dei Liguori and Donna Anna his wife, at their country house of Marianella,¹ outside Naples. They had been married in May, 1695, and the advent of their first-born child was a source of deep joy. He was baptized on the Feast of St. Michael, and in addition to the names Alphonsus Maria, and six others, he was called after SS. Cosmas and Damian, on whose feast he was born. Among the numerous visitors who, according to the custom of the country, came to congratulate the young mother, was a venerable Jesuit, Francis Jerome,² destined in the following century to be canonized on the same day as this newly-born infant. It is related that, as he blessed Alphonsus, he foresaw the course of his life: "This little child," he said, "will have a long life, he will live to his ninetieth year, he will become a Bishop, and do great things for God." Probably Donna Anna alone was impressed by these solemn words and cherished the remembrance of them in her heart. If, as Emerson tells us, every soul when it comes into this world brings with it a message from God, it often declares itself but slowly and by degrees, with many promptings of divine grace, and at the cost of patient labour. Such was the case with St. Alphonsus Liguori. His was not a case of

¹ Now a Redemptorist house.

² His biography has been written by Père Bach (Metz, 1867).

luminous understanding from early childhood of God's counsel and plan. His family was not wealthy, for we gather from Alphonsus's letters that money was a serious question with them; and from the same source we learn that Marianella was by no means a luxurious palace, as a Duchess would have found the accommodation too cramped even for a single night.¹ But the Liguori were haughty by nature—so much so, indeed, that the grandfather of our Saint fought a duel at the age of seventy.² A traveller in the seventeenth century describes the Neapolitan people in these words: "Neapolitans despise all other Italians, their nobles despise them, and the *Cavalieri di seggio* form a still more select body, claiming precedence everywhere and refusing to associate with other gentry." Naturally, the Liguori, being of highest birth, were members of these aristocratic circles,³ which played a part in the administration of the city; in fact, one of the family had been Governor in 1190. They had the right of entry by the Porta Nuova, a right which Alphonsus made use of even after he had embraced the religious life. He went one day to vote for the admission of new members, and, although so poorly clad as to be taken for a beggar by the soldier on guard at the gate, he went home in high glee, carrying off enough alms to

¹ Letter of August 22, 1765.

² Tannoia, book iii, ch. xliii.

³ Created by Charles of Anjou in 1266, they were not finally suppressed till 1799. In the eighteenth century five circles were in existence. See Colletta, *History of the Kingdom of Naples*, 1835.

enable him to complete the buildings at Ciorani. His mother, Donna Anna, was of the Cavalieri family, and on her mother's side belonged to the Spanish nobility. Her father was a royal councillor of the "Camera di Santa Chiara" under the Emperor Charles VI, and her brother, Bishop of Troia, in Apulia, was a holy and mortified prelate who warmly encouraged St. Paul of the Cross in founding the Order of the Passionists, and whose memory is held in veneration.

We should like to know something of the childhood of Alphonsus, but, as to intimate details, his biographers are all too silent; for at that period personal traits were passed over as uninteresting. It is certain that he had the happiness of growing up in a truly Christian home, but one could wish that in his early years he had been allowed a little more gaiety and freedom. The Marchese dei Liguori¹ was Captain of the galleys of Naples under the Austrian Government. He was a very devout man, and when on a voyage his cabin was adorned with holy pictures. Moreover, in order daily to remind himself of Our Saviour's sufferings, he had always with him four small pictures of Our Lord, in the Garden of Olives, at the pillar, before the people, and laden with His cross. But, unfortunately, lively faith does not necessarily develop those natural virtues which render people attractive.

¹ He was born in 1670, and died a holy death in November, 1745. In the previous year he had asked permission to enter the Congregation founded by his son.

The Marchesa dei Liguori was a noble character, charitable to her neighbours and severe towards herself, who, in spite of the cares of a large family,¹ practised even to the end of a long life² devotions and austerities worthy of the cloister. She wished herself to implant in her children's hearts their first idea of religion, and so every morning, after blessing them, she taught them their prayers, while in the evening she gathered them round her again to speak to them of God. Surely she must have rejoiced to see that her eldest son preferred dressing little altars and celebrating the feasts in his own childish way to any other amusements. In later years he reproached himself for two faults—in his eyes serious—committed at this time of his life. One day he took some oranges from the garden, without leave, and on another occasion he opposed his father's wishes about some small drawing-room entertainment. This shows the delicacy of his conscience, and we are not surprised that Villani, an authoritative witness, declares him to have been a Saint from his infancy. There is no doubt that his mother had a large share in this early develop-

¹ After Alphonsus three other sons were born—Benedict, who became a Benedictine ; Cajetan, a priest ; and Hercules, the only one to marry. There were three daughters, two of whom entered the Convent of St. Jerome in Naples, and the third, Teresa, married the Duke of Presenzano.

² She died in November, 1755, at the age of eighty-five, and had the happiness of receiving the Last Sacraments from her son's hands. He spent three days with her, and then left her to await in peace the call of God.

ment of virtue; he was always full of tender affection and deep gratitude towards her, and even in extreme old age loved to recall all he owed her.

Meantime a change of rulers took place in Naples. When Charles II, the last descendant of Charles V on the throne of Spain, died, in the year 1700, the ostentatious Don Louis de la Cerda, Duke of Medina Cœli, was Viceroy. He immediately proclaimed Philip of Anjou, now Philip V of Spain, as Sovereign of Naples. Nevertheless, although Charles II had bequeathed to him the crown, his succession was hotly disputed by the Austrian Hapsburgs. On the night of September 22 and 23 a tumult broke out in the city, headed by some of the nobles. Led away by the promises of the Emperor Leopold of Austria, they invited his son, the Archduke Charles, to reign over the Two Sicilies. The plot failed, however, owing to the popular indifference, and it became known as the *Macchia* conspiracy, from its chief author, the ambitious but poverty-stricken Prince of *Macchia*, Jacobo Gambacorta. Pillage and massacre ensued, the Duke of Medina Cœli with difficulty escaped death, and his successor, the Duke of Escalona, only repressed the outbreak by violent measures. In the following spring Philip V was solemnly welcomed at Naples, and his largesses, his clemency, and the festivities celebrated in his honour, evoked demonstrative enthusiasm. An equestrian statue in bronze was erected in his honour, though in barely five years it was to be broken in pieces and thrown into the sea. For, in

fact, the gates of the city were again opened in July, 1707, with the same demonstrations of joy, this time to the Austrian troops, commanded by Count Martinitz, while the populace hurled insults at the Duke of Escalona, taken prisoner at Gaeta by General Daun.

But the popular joy was soon stilled by menacing rumblings which foretold an eruption of Vesuvius, the city was covered with ashes, and darkness reigned. The Cardinal Archbishop ordered a solemn procession, and himself carried the relic of St. Januarius, and a certain measure of tranquillity was restored. The Emperor Joseph I of Austria, who had succeeded his father Leopold in 1703, gave the Kingdom of Naples to his brother, and Charles, confirmed in its possession by the Treaties of Utrecht and Rastadt (1713-1714), continued to reign till 1734, even after his succession to the imperial crown in 1711.¹

The numerous disputes over this unfortunate country and the consequent disturbances caused dire misery, dividing families, sowing the seeds of discord, violence and ruin, and exciting men to deeds of avarice and hatred.

During this stormy period Alphonsus did not leave his parents, and we are assured that his time

¹ The Emperor Charles VI reigned until 1740. In 1708 he had married Elisabeth Christine of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel, and was the father of the celebrated Maria Teresa. Sicily was not reunited to Naples till 1720, when Sardinia passed to the King of Savoy, and it was not until 1724 that Pope Innocent XIII gave the kingdom of the Two Sicilies to Charles VI.

was well employed, for in January, 1713, when only seventeen years of age, he received his degree of Doctor of Law. His early studies had been entrusted to Domenico Buonaccio, a learned and pious priest of Calabria. From Latin he passed to Greek, French, and Philosophy. This last, no doubt but poorly taught, made only a slight impression on him. To these were added mathematics, geography, and cosmography, sciences which he in turn taught the young religious in the early days of the Redemptorist foundation.¹ His remarkable intellect grasped all these subjects with ease. Drawing, painting, and music also had their place in the scheme of his education, and his artistic aptitude revealed itself at a very early age. In later life he occasionally took up his brush again, and the chapel at Illiceto was decorated by him with figures of Saints and graceful landscapes. Throughout his life music was one of his chief joys, and he must have had a very real devotion to survive his father's methods of training. The Marquis would compel him to practise three hours a day, and he would, if possible, himself superintend the lesson, otherwise he would put professor and pupil under lock and key for the appointed time. As to dancing and fencing, the solemn Tannoia refuses to believe that his revered master ever practised such frivolities, in his opinion dangerous alike to soul and body.

¹ Tannoia relates: "We still preserve in our house at Illiceto a map of the world which he made with his own hands."

When Alphonsus was still young his mother took him to make his first Confession to Father Tomaso Pagano, who remained his Confessor till he was thirty-five years of age. This latter was a devout Oratorian of the Girolamini, as they are still called in Naples, from the fact that St. Philip Neri founded his Institute when he was living at San Girolamo in Rome. Alphonsus therefore had the inestimable blessing of being early imbued with the spirit of St. Philip, and entertained for a short while the idea of entering the Congregation, for which he always preserved a special affection. At the age of nine his confessor admitted him to a confraternity for boys of noble birth, and his memory was cherished in it for many years. We are told that on one occasion he took the part of the demon in a sacred drama entitled *Sant' Alessio*, and obtained a brilliant success by his playing on the harpsicord; but it was rather his tender and solid piety which made him remembered. None came more regularly to the Sunday exercises or followed them with greater recollection, and very soon he received his First Communion¹ from the hands of Father Pagano. Nothing could be more edifying than to watch him reading his prayers during Mass, or to see his fervour in approaching the Holy Table and in his lengthy thanksgiving. His mother, finding him so ready

¹ He must have been ten or eleven years of age, though Tannoia does not tell us so. Following the custom of the country, he did not receive the Sacrament of Confirmation till much later—September 21, 1722.

to grasp spiritual ideas, and so ardent in putting them into practice, set herself more and more earnestly to cultivate this docile soul. She impressed on him the displeasure that even the smallest fault causes to the Sacred Heart of Our Lord, and before long this child of scarcely twelve rose to such heights of prayer as to become intimately united with his Saviour.

Tannoia, and his other biographers, relate an anecdote which shows us the exquisite delicacy of his soul. It was the custom of the Oratorian Fathers to take any boys who had spent the Sunday with them to some country place. On one occasion they went to the gardens of the Prince of Riccia, on Monte Miradois, where they played a game with oranges. Alphonsus assured his companions that he did not know how to play, but to their annoyance he won thirty rounds in succession, whereupon one of his opponents lost his temper so far as to make use of an unseemly word. "What!" cried our Saint, "would you offend God for the sake of a few miserable coins? Take them!" and throwing down the money he had won he walked sadly away. When evening drew on, and it was time to return, Alphonsus did not appear, and a search was made. He was found immovable, and as though rapt in ecstasy, before a small statue of Our Lady, which he had placed in the branches of a tree, thus consoling his wounded heart.

III

It may surprise us to learn that a youth of such evident piety decided to study law. God had not yet manifested to him his high vocation, and he was far too humble, and had far too exalted an idea of the dignity of the priesthood, to dream that he was called to it. We can easily understand that Alphonsus, with his gentle disposition, did not feel drawn to a soldier's life—a life less attractive in Naples even than elsewhere, as the country was ruled by foreign masters. The Bar, leading to the judge's bench, was better suited to his studious and conscientious nature, and it gave him the assurance that he was devoting both his work and his life to the cause of truth and justice. His parents encouraged this choice, for they could easily foresee that before long he would fully satisfy their legitimate ambition in his regard. In Italy the nobility did not think it beneath them to study law and plead at the Bar.¹

Before becoming a priest, St. Francis of Sales was a student at the University of Padua, and then a lawyer at Chambéry. Beccaria, the celebrated author of the *Traité des délits et des peines* (1764), was a Marquis, as also was Tanucci, who began life by teaching law at Pisa; and Filangieri, whose *Science de la Législation* is still quoted, belonged to the old aristocracy of Naples. This taste dated back to earlier days, and is mentioned in the pages

¹ See Carlo Goldoni, *Theatre and Life in Italy in the Eighteenth Century*, by C. Rabany (1896), p. 178.

of a Parisian traveller as far back as 1632. "The young nobles," he writes, "devote themselves to the study of law, that so they may obtain the posts of magistrates and judges bestowed by the King.

"Nearly all manage to obtain some appointment of the kind, and it is pleasant to see them each morning on their way to the *Vicaria* in their doctors' gowns, their cloaks gathered up by their swords, or even slit to show the scabbard of their daggers—an essential mark of the *Cavaliere di seggia*. In the *Vicaria* itself it is forbidden to carry sword or dagger, but even there they wear the empty scabbard."¹

When Alphonsus, at the age of sixteen, was, by an unusual favour, admitted to the examination of a Doctor of Law he looked a mere boy.² Later in life, without referring to the sensational and memorable success with which he had taken his degree, it amused him to think of the figure he must have cut. "They dressed me up," he said, "in a long robe, which trailed about my feet, and made everyone laugh." But to obtain a degree both in civil and canon law at such an age was an absolute marvel, and could only have been effected at the cost of overwhelming work, especially in a country where the legal codes of so many successive rulers had burdened the country with their respec-

¹ L. Marcheix: *A Parisian in Rome and in Naples in 1632*, from an unpublished manuscript of J. J. Bouchard. Paris, 1897.

² This examination took place on January 21, 1713, when Alphonsus was only sixteen and a half, though twenty was the prescribed age.

tive entanglements. He had few amusements, and even these were strictly limited. In his old age he used to speak of the pleasure he took in hunting. "Now," he added, "I have exchanged the pursuit of game for that of souls." In the evenings he was allowed to amuse himself with some carefully chosen friends at the house of Carlo Cito, whose son became President of the Royal Council, and died a centenarian. They would play at ombra and terzilio, the fashionable games of the period. Once Alphonsus, tarrying somewhat, was late reaching home, and found on his table, instead of the books he had left, a pack of cards laid out. "These are the authors who make you so punctual," was his father's comment.

We are assured by his biographers that, though he pleaded a great number of cases during the eight years he practised as a barrister, he only lost one, and that was his last case. He was an acute jurist, and this will show itself when we come to the moral theologian of later years; his clear, incisive delivery, his strenuous work, and the esteem in which his family and friends were held, soon gained him a position of authority. He loved his profession, and took special pleasure in spending his evenings with President Domenico Caravita, where he would discuss difficult points of law with his young colleagues. Nor did he neglect his artistic tastes. At the opera the music enthralled him, but, lest his modesty should be offended, he was careful to remove his spectacles, and, being short-sighted, he could then enjoy himself without danger of

seeing anything undesirable. He also attended social gatherings in company with his father, and the sweetness and purity of his countenance, together with his charming and attractive manner, made him a universal favourite. Everything pointed to a brilliant future, and it was only natural that his friends should seek a suitable match for him. Negotiations were twice entered into without any reference to Alphonsus' wishes, and twice they ended in failure. When he was barely twenty his father thought that he had found the rich heiress he was seeking for his son. Teresa Liguori, a cousin of our Saint, was sixteen years of age, and was the only daughter of the Prince of Presiccio. The parents on both sides were of one mind, and only delayed the realization of their projects on account of the extreme youth of the young couple. An unexpected event, however, changed the whole situation—a son was born to the Prince of Presiccio, and Teresa was no longer the only child and heiress. Don Giuseppe immediately broke off all negotiations. However, this did not end the matter, for in a few months the little boy died, and Tannoia tells us that Alphonsus' father was now in just as great haste to reopen negotiations. He began once more to visit the Prince and to revive plans of marriage; but Teresa was disgusted, and declared that she would not marry at all. She kept her word, and on May 8, 1719, she entered the Convent of the Religious of the Most Holy Sacrament, where she died a holy death on October 30, 1724.¹

¹ Many years later, at the earnest request of the Mother Superior, St. Alphonsus wrote a short account of her saintly

This failure undoubtedly helped to aggravate the Marquis's irritability. A story is told of him at this time which reveals his violent temper, and at the same time explains what St. Alphonsus meant when in his later years he referred to his great sins in the past. One evening some friends of high rank were invited, and a servant was late in escorting the guests with lights. Don Giuseppe in great anger, not content with reprimanding the servant, went on scolding. Alphonsus was so much annoyed that at last he cried out: "Really, father, what a fuss you make! When once you begin you never know where to stop." The remark was so true that it exasperated his father still further, and he responded by a box on the ear. His son, without a word, retired at once. Supper-time came, and Donna Anna went to look for him in his room. She found him weeping bitterly, and accusing himself of his hasty speech; nor could he rest till he had sought his father and begged his pardon.

Alphonsus was twenty-six years of age, and had already vowed himself before God to the state of celibacy, when another attempt was made to force marriage upon him. Without even warning him, Don Giuseppe tried to obtain for him the hand of the Duke of Presenzano's daughter. Tannoia tells us that it was an advantageous match, and that the parents consented willingly. Family gatherings were arranged in order to throw the young people

life, in the course of which she had suffered many interior trials.

together, but they were torture to the youth, who was to be betrothed in spite of himself. He avowed frankly to his mother that he had no intention of marrying, and to his father's solicitations he pleaded his poor health and frequent attacks of asthma. To his supposed *fiancée* he made himself perfectly clear, and she used to say to those who urged the match on her: "Do you wish me to marry a man who will not even look at me?" "I shall be able," was Alphonsus' warning to her, "to place so many obstacles in the way, that my father will never succeed in arranging this marriage or any other." His legal career and the claims of society had never been sufficient to occupy him entirely or to satisfy the cravings of his heart; indeed, he always set aside a large portion of his time for religious works. He still remained faithful to the Oratorian fathers, continuing to confess each week to Father Pagano; and now, on April 15, 1715, he passed from the boys' confraternity to that of the Doctors at Law. Every morning, before going to the courts of justice, he heard Mass, and found time to wait on the sick in the hospital for incurables, feeding them, making their beds, and consoling them in every possible way. Every year towards the end of Lent he went—generally in company with his father—to make a retreat in some religious house. In 1715, being now eighteen, the retreat given by a Jesuit, Father Buglione, made a lasting impression on him. Those of 1722 and 1723, conducted by the Superior of the Lazarists, Father Vincenzo Cutica, finally shaped the course of his life; and

therefore we may say that his vocation was formed under the influence of St. Ignatius Loyola, St. Vincent de Paul, and St. Philip Neri.

Alphonsus was barely twenty when God made use of his virtuous example to bring an infidel to the faith. At that time Moorish slaves were often employed in the Neapolitan galleys. It was not easy to convert them, even when such an ardent missionary as St. Francis Jerome laboured among them. But one, who belonged to Don Giuseppe, and was attached to the service of Alphonsus, spoke to him of his desire to become a Christian. The example of his young master had roused him to think of the next world, for he said that a religion which could make anyone live so holy a life must indeed be true. Falling suddenly ill, he was taken to the Hospital della Pace, where, it is said, he was warned in a vision of his approaching end. Half an hour after he had received the Sacrament of Baptism he expired with a peaceful smile on his countenance.

IV

Several years passed before Alphonsus made up his mind to become a priest, and in later years he used to reproach himself bitterly for having omitted his accustomed prayers on trifling pretexts at this time of his life, and for having led too worldly a life in other ways. But he never had the misfortune to fall into grievous sin, and this time of comparative indevotion did not last long. In 1722,

by the advice and in the company of his friend Francesco Capecelatro, Duke of Casabona, he made a fervent retreat in the house of the missionaries of St. Vincent de Paul. The following year he returned with his father, and it was then he wrote these words: "I have learnt to know God and to forget the world"; and it was there also that he decided never to marry and to cede his rights of primogeniture to his brother Hercules. He attributed his vocation to the graces he received in his retreats,¹ and also to his habit of paying frequent visits to the Blessed Sacrament.² He loved to adorn the tabernacle with flowers, and the hours he spent before Our Lord exposed on the Altar became more and more precious to him. He began to communicate several times a week, and on September 21, 1722, was admitted to the Sacrament of Confirmation. It seemed as though God wished to endow him with supernatural strength in view of the trial now approaching.

His impressionable temperament rendered him peculiarly sensitive to pain of all kinds, and he was to suffer keenly at the crisis of his vocation. It would seem that his attraction to the Bar had very much diminished, for, as time went on, he grew more and more conscious of the insincerity of many who administered the law, and of the injustice too often dealt out by human justice. But he was not to leave the calling he had loved without having,

¹ Letter to a young man who was deliberating on the choice of a state of life.

² *Visits to the Blessed Sacrament.* Introduction.

so to say, paid for his former successes by a painful and mortifying humiliation. In the summer of 1723 he was called upon to conduct an important lawsuit against the Grand Duke of Tuscany. He had pleaded in his usual masterly style, and the cause seemed gained, when the opposing counsel asked him to read again one of the documents in the case. Liguori willingly did so, and was aghast to find himself clearly in the wrong. How had so vital a point escaped him thus? Might he not be accused of an infamous plot, even though the judge, convinced of his sincerity, tried to explain the mistake? Quite beside himself, he hurried home and shut himself in his room, refusing to eat or to see anyone. It was not till the third day that he consented to open the door, yielding to the tears and entreaties of his mother, though his father's anger had not moved him. Many years later, in speaking of this episode, he would blame himself severely for such violent grief, looking on it as one of the greatest sins of his life, and he would recall characteristically how bitter had tasted the slice of melon which was the first food he consented to take. These closing days of July were sad ones, and marked the beginning of a life of profound silence and retirement. The voluntary recluse cared for nothing but long visits to the Blessed Sacrament or the service of the sick in the hospitals. His parents watched him with uneasiness and dissatisfaction. He threw his father into the deepest dejection by refusing to interest himself in some family business, and by declaring that he

would never again take his place at the Bar. The uncertainty which overspread his plans for the future made the situation still more painful.

But August 28, a day which in after years St. Alphonsus considered the date of his conversion, was to bring, at least to him, clear light and direction. It was a holiday in Naples in honour of the thirty-second birthday of the wife of Charles VI, Emperor of Austria and King of the Two Sicilies. Cardinal Altan, the Viceroy, had prepared a splendid feast for the people. There was to be a reception at Court, and Don Giuseppe intended to go with his eldest son. To his surprise and indignation Alphonsus refused to accompany him ; but, seeing how angry this made his father, he offered to yield the point. The Marchese, however, was not to be appeased, and, still too irritated to present himself at Court, he drove off alone to Marianella, while Alphonsus in deep dismay betook himself to his favourite resort, the hospital for incurables. In the company of the sick and poor he was better able to master his own feelings, and he felt himself nearer to God. Here it was that God waited for him to give him his vocation. His biographer tells us that the house seemed suddenly to tremble, while Alphonsus saw a bright light and heard a voice which said : " Leave the world and give yourself entirely to Me." Instead of crying out that a miracle had happened, or even making any decision, he tranquilly continued his work for the sick. As he was descending the stairs to go away the house again seemed to tremble, and he

heard the same words repeated. His conscience forbade him to doubt further, and from the depths of his heart he answered : " Lord, I have resisted too long ; here I am ; do with me all that Thou wilt." He then withdrew to the Church of Our Lady of Ransom,¹ which he loved, and threw himself on his knees. Once more inundated with a wonderful light, he resolutely offered his life to God, and, as if the better to pledge his faith as a cavalier, he unbuckled his sword and laid it on Our Lady's Altar.

That very evening he consulted his confessor, Father Pagano, who spoke encouragingly, but deferred giving a definite answer for a year's time. Opposition of quite another kind awaited him at home. Alphonsus enjoyed a profound spiritual sweetness during the three days' fast he now imposed on himself to expiate his three days' fast of ill-humour in the previous month. Presently his father returned from Marianella, and at one time would show himself harsh and overbearing, and at another would try by an appeal to his son's feelings to shake his determination of abandoning a career so full of promise. After long hesitation, Alphonsus made known his intentions ; a stormy scene followed, and Don Giuseppe retired in the depths of despair. But he soon returned to the charge, supported by relatives, friends, and even

¹ Tannoia tells us that for the remainder of his life, whenever he visited Naples he went to this church, and spent a long time there thanking his benefactress for her protection. In 1726 he had a serious illness, and obtained permission for the statue to be brought to his room.

priests whom he had won over to his side. All was in vain. God's chosen one stood firm, though at the cost of bitter anguish; and at last Mgr. Cavalieri, his uncle, and Fathers Pagano and Cutica succeeded in bringing his father to reason. He imposed, however, one condition—that his son should give up all idea of becoming an Oratorian, and continue to live at home.¹ He himself took him to Cardinal Pignatelli, a worthy son of St. Cajetan, and Archbishop of Naples. Alphonsus was twenty-six years of age when, his soul unsullied as a child's, but strong and tempered by suffering, he cast off for ever the trappings of the world.

¹ On Saturday, October 23, 1723.

CHAPTER. II

CALL TO THE PRIESTHOOD

NINE years elapsed between October, 1723, and the foundation of the Congregation of the Redemptorists, and during that time Alphonsus showed what was his conception of the sacred ministry.

I

He had eagerly taken the first step in his ecclesiastical course, nor did he wait till his ordination, three years later,¹ December, 1726, to adopt the life and spirit of a priest. Doubtless, in fulfilment of his promise, he still lived at home.² Besides, it would not have been expected that the eldest son of a noble family, already a celebrated barrister, should enter the diocesan seminary where only a portion of the clergy were prepared for Sacred Orders, and these but the younger men. The life he now set himself to lead was austere and unworldly. Here are a few instances from the rule of life he drew up for himself. "Each day I will

¹ He received the tonsure and minor orders in 1724; the sub-diaconate in September, 1725; and the diaconate in April, 1726.

² Till June, 1729.

make at least one hour of mental prayer, and visit the Blessed Sacrament, especially in the churches where it is exposed. I will wear the cassock and tonsure and behave circumspectly, yet without affectation, singularity, or pride. I will confess at least once a week, and receive Holy Communion still more frequently." His demeanour was marked by simplicity, and if for some time he allowed himself to be attended by a lackey, it was in deference to his father's wishes. Don Giuseppe could not resign himself at all; he carefully avoided meeting his son, and, even after a year had passed, coming across him accidentally, he turned his back on him. We can imagine how much Alphonsus must have suffered from this hostility.

Meantime he practised most severe penances, and fasted every Saturday on bread and water. These austerities were a subject of grave anxiety to his mother, not without reason, for in the summer of 1726 he fell seriously ill from exhaustion. He continued in this state for three months, and one night his condition became so grave that Holy Viaticum was brought to him in haste. The following day he expressed a great wish to see once more the dearly loved statue of Our Lady of Ransom, before which he had laid his sword three years previously. This consolation could not be refused, and the statue was brought and placed in front of the dying man, who prayed devoutly, and at once experienced a wonderful improvement in his condition.

During these years of preparation the twofold

purpose which characterized the founder of the Redemptorists showed itself more and more clearly—namely, a great solicitude to be intimately united to God, and an ardent desire to help souls. He was not content to serve Mass every morning at Sant' Angelo a Segno, the parish church to which he had been officially attached by Cardinal Pignatelli, but on feast days he loved to share in the solemn services as acolyte or thurifer. Tannoia tells us that this was a foretaste of heaven. The Blessed Sacrament, exposed in a different church of Naples each day, drew him daily to devout contemplation, from which he could scarcely tear himself away—in fact, his Confessor was obliged to restrict these visits to an hour and a half. But to these desires of intimate union with Our Lord he joined an extraordinary zeal and fervour in the exercise of active ministry. Every Sunday he catechized the children, and in order to assemble them he was not ashamed to walk through the streets singing hymns and carrying a crucifix, as was then the custom. How can we describe the care he exercised over those who were to make their First Communion?

Not content with helping the Lazarist Fathers assiduously at the reunions for scholastics, under the direction of Father Cutica, he also obtained admission to the "White Company" (so called from the colour of their mantles), whose work was to assist those condemned to death.¹ He also eagerly sought admittance to the Congregation for

¹ He wrote a little work on this apostolate.

evangelizing the people and giving missions, a Congregation which was destined later on to offer violent opposition to the founder of the Redemptorists.

In all this he was a source of edification to his new companions while sharing in their work. Especially was he successful in winning the hearts of children, and as evening drew near the poor would gather round to listen to him in the streets. It is not surprising to learn that while yet a deacon he received permission to preach in all the churches of Naples. In the spring of the year 1726 he preached his first sermon at the Church of St. John before the Latin Gate during the Forty Hours.¹ All the love of his soul overflowed while he preached, and his subject was one which later on he was never weary of setting against man's misery and ingratitude—the infinite love of Our Lord Jesus Christ. His text was the burning appeal of Isaias to the Messias: "Oh that Thou wouldst rend the heavens and come down . . . the very waters would be set on fire!"

It was in order to render his apostolate efficacious, as well as to nourish his own devotion, that Liguori made a rigorous practice of daily study. He was careful never to give up intellectual work, and later on he insisted on it among the members of his Congregation. He ordered them to use their minds as if the conversion of souls depended on them

¹ From this time, according to Tannoia, Alphonsus was generally chosen to preach in any church where the Blessed Sacrament was exposed.

alone, and to put their trust in God as if of themselves they could achieve nothing. His novices were to receive solid instruction, but it was not to be a matter of routine; he wished them to have literary tastes, but not to be delayed by the "useless and out-of-date questions formerly in use in the schools."¹ Hardly was he ordained than he registered the following among his resolutions: "I must study to acquire knowledge." Undoubtedly he must often have quoted what St. Francis of Sales, one of his chosen models, used to say to the priests of his time: "I exhort you to devote yourself seriously to study; knowledge is an eighth sacrament for a priest, and the greatest evils have arisen because the ark (of knowledge) has been found in other hands than those of the Levites." Alphonsus also applied himself more earnestly still to the study of the dogmas of the Church, and to moral and mystical theology, putting himself under the most enlightened masters of the day. He devoted himself in particular to the study of the Sacred Scriptures, searching in the best commentaries, and never allowing a day to pass without meditating on some passage. The only science which interested him was the science of religion, and above all the science of the Saints. "Let us envy,"² he said, echoing the words of the *Imitation*, "not those who know many things, but only those who know how to love Jesus Christ."

¹ Tannoia, book ii, ch. liv.

² *Reflections on diverse points of Spirituality*, vi, and *Preparation for Death*, xx, § 3.

Perhaps he carried this detachment from profane studies too far.¹ One could wish that he had been possessed of wider interests—after all, everything turns on that—a deeper insight into the needs and possibilities of the age in which he lived, more readiness to prove that Christianity harmonizes with all that is good in man and promotes his real progress, more of the method of apologetics in assimilating and developing the truths of tradition. But, after all, everyone has his own bent, his own sphere of work. Liguori's consisted less in meeting the objections of unbelievers to the fundamental truths of faith, than of making that faith more living and fruitful in the hearts of believers. What he knew how to speak of, and in a manner rarely spoken as he spoke, was the love of Our Lord, of Jesus present in the Tabernacle, of Jesus our Saviour crucified. And is it a small matter for a priest to nourish and propagate the spirit of Christian life?

II

There was great joy in Naples when Alphonsus, already held in veneration, was ordained priest on

¹ For instance, he once smilingly remarked to some priests who wished to visit the museum at Portici: "If you gathered here all the museums in the world, I would not stir a step to see them. I once visited the museum at Nola, and I have regretted it ever since." Such detachment seems exaggerated, but its defence may be found in the need of a counter-example to the excesses of many Italian prelates, even the highest, in an opposite direction.

Saturday, December 21, 1726, and on the following day said his first Mass. He bore no resemblance to those elegant and worldly priests whom he so often upbraided for their conduct¹ and style of living. They were to be seen dressed in silk instead of cassocks, with lace ruffles and silver-buckled shoes, sauntering in the streets or looking over their balconies at the passers-by, while they mumbled their office or gossiped with their friends. They would go to the Altar with their long hair curled and powdered, and, cutting short the words and ceremonies and hurrying through the sacred action, they would finish Mass in a quarter of an hour. So little devotion did they inspire that the laity were heard to say: "These priests destroy our faith with their Masses." What a different example Alphonsus was to give! Tannoia notes with admiration the length of time he took in offering the Holy Sacrifice, besides his preparation and thanksgiving. This friend of the poor, with his plain full cassock and his face worn by penance, seemed as destitute as they were. Many of his former admirers—lawyers, judges, and councillors—accused him of carrying things to extremes, and would have no more to do with him; and yet no one could fail to be moved by his sincerity, or to be subdued by the contagious fervour of his faith. And, in consequence, he spoke with that authority which all the rules of rhetoric will not succeed in supplying. In his sermons there was no trace of the vanity which

¹ See *Selva*, "Useful Reflections for Bishops," etc., and the Introduction to the *Translation of the Psalms*.

he abominated¹ in a Christian preacher, and he would have echoed Pascal's phrase, that true eloquence scorns eloquence, or rather that it is a sacrilegious theft to seek one's own glory in announcing the Divine Word. He invoked the authority of Muratori, one of those who honoured Italy by their learning in the eighteenth century, to reprove showy rhetoric even in panegyrics. This lengthy description of a garden, say, or of a tempest, has cost its author a week's work. And what good does it do? What fruit can souls derive from these brilliant fireworks, which leave behind them nothing but smoke? It is to preachers such as these that the words of Isaias apply: "Who are these that fly as clouds?" And he would quote the sensible remark of a peasant: "When the clouds pass so high overhead, there is no hope of rain." As Rector of his Congregation we shall find him merciless towards preciosity, and he himself tells us of one of his young priests who "preached a sermon in honour of Our Lady, and expressed himself with studied elegance and loftiness of style. Not only did I make him come down at once from the pulpit," says the Saint, "but I forbade him to say Mass for three days." In delivery, as in style, he urges his preachers to avoid affectation and exaggeration. The congregation is wearied by the perpetual vehemence of certain missionaries, who

¹ See *Selva*, Part II, Fourth Instruction; "Letter to a Religious on the method of Preaching"; Preface to *Sermons*; and letters to his congregation in November, 1751, June 27 and September 7, 1773.

risk losing their voices and breaking a bloodvessel. If one must speak loudly, why adopt a declamatory tone? Preaching should be like talking to a friend, to explain something or give him advice. Just be natural. "One day I made up my mind to imitate Father Cutica, and in presence of Mgr. Falcoia I preached in a sing-song tone. I received a severe reprimand, and have never done so since."

The following prayer, which must have come from the depths of his heart, expresses what he felt so deeply: "O Saviour of the world, Who, especially through the fault of Thy priests, art scarcely known, and still less loved, Thou who gavest Thy life for the salvation of souls, deign through the merits of Thy most holy Passion to give light and grace to all those priests who might convert sinners and sanctify the whole world if they would but preach Thy Word simply and without vanity, after Thy example and that of the Apostles." This style of preaching, simple and grave — Apostolic preaching, as St. Alphonsus called it—was the only style he practised. It may be that his impatience of any kind of vain affectation and pretensions to learning caused him to disparage overmuch a cultivated style and a proper attention to composition and expression. And yet he himself has laid it down that a sermon to an educated congregation should not be quite the same as to a company of rustics. In any case, the discourse, to be efficacious, must never fail to be, what he above all valued, serious, sincere, temperate. In a word, he wished all preachers of the

Word of God to carry out the precept he loved so much, "Break thy bread to the hungry" (Isa. lviii.), for in this way all would receive the teaching of the Gospel, which for them is the bread of life.

And in truth, as Tannoia tells us, his words had "the sweetness of manna," and the learned and simple alike relished them. Among his hearers were distinguished ecclesiastics, seculars and regulars, barristers, judges, and men and women of the highest rank, all of whom left the church edified and impressed. Among the most assiduous was Nicola Capasso, a celebrated scholar of the day, who had a reputation for his caustic wit. "Don Nicola," said Liguori one day, smiling, "are you by any chance meditating some satire against me?" "By no means," replied the man of letters. "In your sermons one does not think of style or rounding of periods; you forget yourself in order to preach Jesus crucified, and that is why I love to hear you."

Just as we have found Alphonsus in the pulpit—holy, simple, and filled with burning zeal and piety—so shall we find him in the Confessional. A year after his ordination he received faculties to hear confessions, and immediately penitents crowded round him in thousands.

In order to find time for this work he was the first to arrive at the church early in the morning, and the last to leave it at night. He received everyone with sweetness, happy to be able, in silence and recollection, to heal souls and be the

means of restoring them to Divine grace. Towards sinners anxious to be freed from evil habits he was tenderness itself, and though he could not always give absolution immediately, he treated them as a father, and inspired them with confidence in the merits of Our Lord Jesus Christ. He used to say that the deeper¹ a soul was plunged in vice and given over to the slavery of the devil, so much the more did he feel bound to help and attract it, that he might deliver it and restore it to the embrace of its Saviour. Unless a sinner feels that he is loved, he will not make up his mind to abandon his sin.

He knew also how to arouse contrition in those who came to him without the necessary dispositions. A young man, after confessing many grave sins, showed plainly that he had little sorrow for them. "What injury has Jesus Christ done you?" cried Alphonsus, in such moving terms that the sinner was immediately enlightened and transformed. We can imagine what must have been the inward fervour of such a soul which possessed the gift of thus inspiring sorrow for sin.

III

It would indeed be matter for surprise if a soul so generous and so truly Christian was not filled with a special solicitude for the poor. It was in

¹ In his old age he would say that he did not remember ever sending away a sinner unabsolved without his returning later in the necessary dispositions for absolution, and still less did he remember ever treating anyone with harshness or bitterness.

order to work for them that Alphonsus joined the Confraternity of Missioners already referred to, and took part in many missions in Naples and in the neighbouring villages. He never spared himself, and generally preached the principal sermon at the evening service. He did not shrink from contact with the poorest and most miserable, but sought them out in the open places where they gathered together, and instructed them in the open air. Very soon he had a regular following of *lazzaroni*, of masons, joiners, and workmen of all kinds, and, says Tannoia, the poorer their condition the greater his love towards them. These poor people, touched by his kind heart, showed him every mark of affection and confidence. In order to instruct them more fully, he and other priests would gather them together during the lovely summer evenings in some unfrequented piazza, and here, after the cares and labours of the day, these poor people would listen to the Word of God and lift towards Him the sweet incense of their prayers while the peaceful shades of night fell over the city and stars illumined the darkening sky.

However, both the civil and ecclesiastical authorities became alarmed at these devout gatherings. Over-zealous friars, little inclined to interpret charitably the actions of others, heard some unaccountable noise and merriment; this was mysterious—nay, open to grave suspicion. Might not this be a hotbed of Molinism or some other heresy? Clearly it was their duty to denounce the matter to the Cardinal Archbishop, that he might

take strong measures. It was not long since the authorities had been obliged to disperse the gatherings of Lutheran soldiers, who had come into the country under the Austrian rule, and who looked on the devotion of the Italians as idolatry. Acting on this information, Mgr. Pignatelli addressed himself to the Governor of the city, who at once sent a Captain of the Guard in disguise to assist at one of the meetings. The Captain reported that he had not very well understood what was going on (as might easily happen to the most honest of soldiers), but that he had observed things both good and bad. In consequence, one September evening these good people found themselves surrounded by soldiers, who led them off to the guard-house. But matters quickly righted themselves; the magistrates were greatly edified by all they learnt, and Tannoia tells us that the Governor, in dismissing the prisoners, shed tears of emotion. Nevertheless, because of the evil times, the Cardinal Archbishop deemed it more prudent to put a stop to this particular form of apostolate.

But the work once begun did not perish; though changed, it continued to grow. The meetings no longer took place in the open air. A barber lent his shop for the conferences given each evening by Pietro Barbarese, a schoolmaster converted by Alphonsus to a holy life; and as numbers increased they were compelled to look for still larger premises, and moved into a chapel belonging to the Guild of Butchers. Before long other groups were organized on the same plan, and Cardinal

Pignatelli took them under his protection and gave them rules of their own. Every evening they assembled at the Angelus, while on Sundays they heard Mass together; and in the afternoon, after tending the sick in the hospitals, they would go out into the fresh country air. In 1834 there were still to be found in Naples nearly a hundred of these chapels, each of which counted some three hundred members. In 1840 the Redemptorists started a similar work at Liège, and this Association of the Holy Family, now erected into a Confraternity, has spread throughout the world, and counts at least three hundred thousand members.

Alphonsus's love for his fellow-men was like a welcome dew, which even in the humblest surroundings helped to bring forth the fair blossoms of holiness. Without speaking of those who entered religious orders, we may cite among his first penitents the schoolmaster Pietro Barbarese, formerly a bitter infidel; Luca Nardone, a deserter from the army, who barely escaped sentence of death, and who now became a source of edification to others; a miller, a potter, and a dealer in old books—all three, says Tannoia, remarkable for their virtue; a cowherd, a waterman, a joiner, a goldsmith, all venerated for the intense love they bore to Our Lord; and two hawkers of eggs and chestnuts in the streets of Naples, both of them afterwards buried in a church, and looked upon as powerful advocates with God. Such were the friends and followers of Alphonsus.

After the poor he felt a special attraction towards

the souls consecrated to God's service. He gave innumerable retreats to priests, beginning with the one he was ordered to preach to the clergy of Naples in the very year of his ordination. It was for them that he wrote many of his works.¹ Nuns, too, of whom there were such a number in the kingdom of the Two Sicilies, eagerly availed themselves of his help. Tannoia did not know of a single religious house in Naples which did not have recourse to his direction, and he rejoiced in helping them and in sending them new subjects.

In his opinion, salvation was difficult for any married woman who lived a worldly life,² and happiness hardly possible. "For many years," he said,³ "I have heard the confessions of married women in all ranks of life, noble and plebeian, rich and poor, and I do not remember ever to have found one contented with her lot." Without stopping to inquire whether this discontent was not the result of human things in general, rather than of the married state in particular, Alphonsus would dilate on the happiness of escaping matrimony, with a conviction very unflattering to husbands and to the morals of the times. But his words made such an impression that, after his sermons, it was no rare thing to hear of engagements being broken off, and vocations to the religious life.

¹ Not only those on *Moral Theology*, but the *Selva*, *Sermons*, the *Translation of the Psalms*, etc.

² Letters of July, 1777, and November, 1780, to women relatives.

³ *The True Spouse of Christ; or, the Nun Sanctified*, ch. i.

"Souls who live in the world," he cried, "are like trees planted in a desert, where the dew from heaven falls but rarely. . . . Nuns, on the contrary, are like those shrubs which are planted in fruitful ground and continually refreshed by heavenly dew." These abodes of peace may be compared to bountiful sources from which virtue is spread abroad. Liguori could not bear that nuns should think only of themselves, and forget the sufferings and temptations of their brethren. With his profound faith in prayer and in the mystery of the Communion of Saints, he relied in a large measure for the conversion of sinners on those chosen souls who give themselves up to fervent contemplation and self-sacrifice.

Only two remain of the letters written by St. Alphonsus before 1732, and they are addressed to nuns. His correspondence, more than **any** other of his writings, conveys an idea of the depth of his personal influence, and these two letters reveal to us the whole Saint. "Love Jesus—every moment you will be giving Him joy by loving Him. Speak to Him often, especially when you are in choir or in presence of the Blessed Sacrament; speak to Him of love oftener than of anything—it is what He likes better than aught else. Love His adorable Heart, His Divine Will, and then, whether you are predestined or reprobate, forsaken or filled with consolation, cherished by God or seemingly abandoned by Him, have no anxiety. Say: 'Lord, Thy good pleasure, Thy glory is enough for us.'"
And in the other letter he writes: "Love Jesus,

love Mary. Love and be cheerful. When we love so good a God we should never allow sad thoughts to enter into our hearts. I forbid you to omit the recreation hour for any reason whatsoever, and if by any chance some little cloud has risen, each one of you must do your best to disperse it and to restore cheerfulness to the conversation. Oh, my dear children, if you knew with what tenderness Jesus shelters you all in His loving Heart! You have chosen Him for your Spouse, but He chose you long ages ago, even from eternity. Let us help one another in this stormy life, where we are always in danger of losing God. But no, you will not lose Him; you will always belong to God, and He will always be yours. What more can you desire?"

IV

It may be guessed that before many years had passed, a priest who expended his energies so liberally was everywhere sought after and overburdened with work. But his fervour was never satisfied. Already he was putting into practice what later on, at the age of thirty-eight, he made the subject of a vow (it is asserted)—never to lose a moment. It was a vow as characteristic as it was uncommon, for how few are there who can undertake not to waste one day? He was accustomed to retire with some of his fellow-priests to a lonely spot in the country for two or three days each month, there to unite himself more closely to God in silence and recollection. But the time had

now come when he wished to separate himself still more from the world, and leave his father's house. Two months previously, Matteo Ripa, a courageous missionary who had passed seventeen years in China, had founded an institution called the College of the Holy Family, or of the Chinese, and here in June, 1729, Alphonsus joined this poor community, and took possession of a humble cell. The charge of the small church attached was committed almost entirely to him. Here he would spend long hours in the Confessional, and preach each year a retreat and various novenas, making a special point of preaching every Friday on the Glories of Mary. A large congregation gathered round him.

He was still one of the most active members of the Congregation of the Propaganda. During the terrible epidemic which ravaged Naples in 1729 he lavished all his care on the sick, and took a prominent part in the general mission given in the great Church of the Holy Ghost shortly after. At the conclusion of one of these sermons his father said to him, with tears in his eyes: "My son, it is you who have just taught me how to know God." At the beginning of 1730 we find him helping in the missions given in the populous district of Marano, and then at Casoria, Capodimonte, and in the Church of the Annunziata of Naples. He worked so hard that grave fears were entertained lest he should injure his health. In 1731 he had charge of several missions given in the provinces of Bari and Lecce, whilst later on he was at Foggia, the capital of Apulia, devastated in the

previous March by an earthquake. This town belonged to the Bishopric of Troia, where Mgr. Cavalieri was held in veneration, and his nephew Liguori was received with open arms, and begged to preach a novena in honour of Our Lady. He yielded to the entreaties of the Bishop, and it was during this time that, as he himself solemnly attests,¹ a miraculous picture of Our Lady exhibited signs of life. On his return to Naples, after having visited Monte Gargano, the sanctuary of St. Michael, one of his patron Saints to whom he was especially devout, the Superior of the Propaganda reprimanded him severely before all the Community for having preached without his leave. Alphonsus answered not one word to excuse or defend himself.

Now that he lived at the Chinese College and was no longer restrained by his parents, he gave himself up to a strange desire for suffering, macerating his already enfeebled body, and allowing it scant repose either on a board or the bare ground. The night he spent in prayer either in his room

¹ In 1777, when the Chapter of St. Peter's were about to crown the holy picture. Probably this was the beginning of that series of strange phenomena ascribed to many pictures of Our Lady throughout Italy at the close of the eighteenth century—tears or marvellous sweats, etc. In consequence of these, a special feast, known under the title of "Our Lady of Prodigies," was instituted by Pius VI after the inquiries of the special commission appointed by him (See *La Question du Sur naturel*, par le P. A. Matignon, 1861, p. 392). It is said that St. Alphonsus was rapt in ecstasy before pictures of Our Lady several times in the course of his missions in Salerno in 1738, Foggia in 1745, and Amalfi in 1756.

or in the church. Nor was this all. He was tormented by interior trials. He felt himself cast off by Our Lord and His Holy Mother. God seemed to withdraw Himself, and he who has enlightened and consoled so many souls, himself walked in darkness and desolation. There came a time, however, when Alphonsus was obliged to allow himself some relaxation. It seems to have been in 1731.¹ A friend offered him and his companions a country house near the sea, in the neighbourhood of Amalfi, one of the most charming spots round Naples. The coast is as beautiful as that of Sorrento, but more solitary, and its chain of hills is bounded on the horizon by the peaks of the Apennines. They set out, a party of six, and after a somewhat rough voyage they fell in with the Vicar-General of Scala.² He conducted the newcomers to a picturesque hermitage on a height near the little town of Scala, known as Santa Maria dei Monti. The luminous atmosphere, the brilliance of the flowers and verdure of June, and the distant perspective of mountains and sea, all helped to raise their thoughts to God, and still more the presence of the Most Holy Sacrament, before which they took turns to watch, because, possessing no tabernacle, the Ciborium had to remain exposed on the Altar.³

¹ According to Tannoia, Villecourt, and Capecelatro. According to P. Berthe it was in 1730.

² Scala was situated four miles from the coast, and was at that time the chief city of a diocese which has since been united to that of Amalfi.

³ According to Jeancard.

The few weeks spent by Liguori in this beautiful spot left a lasting impression on him, and were in some way the turning-point which fixed his vocation. Some shepherds from round about were quickly attracted to the devout inhabitants of the hermitage, and it was brought home with force to Alphonsus, not only how utterly ignorant of Christianity were some of the rural populations, but also how joyfully they received the preaching of the Gospel.¹ He was begged to preach at Scala, not only in the Cathedral, on the Sunday within the octave of Corpus Christi, but also to the nuns of San Salvatore. He promised to return and preach the novena for the Feast of Our Holy Redeemer, called the Novena of the Crucifix, and also the spiritual exercises at the Convent. There it was that the charge was to be put on him of founding a new Institute.

¹ In this sermon, worth a whole mission, "he proposed," says Tannoia, "such forcible arguments for the love of Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, and showed so clearly the horror which sin should inspire in us, that the whole congregation burst into sobs."

CHAPTER III

THE CONGREGATION OF THE REDEMPTORISTS

I

IN later life, when St. Alphonsus had grown too old to give missions, his friends would try to console him by the assurance that as founder of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer he shared in its apostolic works. He would reply emphatically: "The Congregation? It was God who founded the Congregation; I was but an unworthy instrument in His hands." Did he mean that he had had no share in the work, and that it had cost him no labour? Far from it. But when, in November, 1732, the first six members of what was destined to be a new Order, working for neglected souls, met together at Scala, the path they were entering on seemed to be very clearly indicated by God's Providence.

In looking back we see that this step was but the completion of a long period of preparation. For many years Alphonsus had shown a special predilection for the lowly and the abandoned, and yet at the same time he felt powerfully drawn to a cloistered life. With his colleagues in the Propaganda he had trained himself to the work of a

missioner. His short stay among the goatherds and shepherds on the mountains near Scala proved to him that in a kingdom calling itself Christian there were many outcasts to whom the Gospel was absolutely unknown! His was not the only soul interiorly urged to succour such misery. Mgr. Falcoia, the new Bishop of Castellamare,¹ had often dreamed of a religious society which should devote itself specially to the imitation of our Lord and the evangelization of the poor. He had had a glimpse of it in a revelation, which transported him with joy; and about the year 1715 he had even tried to make a beginning with a few priests, who, however, soon abandoned the work. Under his direction the nuns at Scala, who previously had been merely a company of pious women, a kind of *béguinage* very common in Italy, now became penetrated with the same spirit. They aspired to a far closer imitation of our Lord, and Sister Maria Celeste² proposed to them a method of life the rules of which she declared the Divine Master Himself had given her. Liguori was well acquainted both with Mgr. Falcoia and with the nuns, and by his advice, given after minute examination, they began in May, 1731, to follow

¹ Born in Naples in 1663, he became Bishop in 1730, after belonging for forty-seven years to a Congregation of Priests—"The Devout Workers"—which he edified by his example. He died in 1743.

² Maria Celeste Costarosa, born in 1696, had a brother a Jesuit. She had entered a Carmelite convent, but when this was closed she and her two sisters put themselves under the direction of Father Falcoia at Scala.

their new rule—that of the Redemptoristines.¹ Everything, therefore, seemed favourable to the idea of a new order of missionaries, and yet the holy priest was astonished and troubled when Sister Maria Celeste urged him, in the Name of Jesus Christ, to carry it out.

She declared that in 1731, on the eve of the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi, one of her favourite Saints, our Lord had appeared to her, with that heroic lover of poverty on His right, and Liguori on His left; the latter was pointed out to her as the head of a new Congregation of Missionaries. The following day a fresh revelation showed her more precisely how these imitators of their Divine Master were to devote themselves to the most neglected souls, and to infuse into the hearts of the poorest and lowliest the spirit of prayer, the practice of meditation, and the love of God made Man. Another nun, Sister Maria Columba, also received supernatural lights in confirmation of this message from on high. When Alphonsus was informed by Mgr. Falcoia of these extraordinary events, he discussed them with the religious herself, and she repeated with unwavering assurance that he would be disobeying God if he did not leave Naples in order to found an Institute for the evangelization of the poor country-folk. The idea, at first rejected as a temptation, now began to haunt him and give him no rest. He feared, on the one hand, that he might be sacrificing for a

¹ Liguori himself superintended the drawing up of the rules, which occupied two years.

fancy the undoubtedly fruitful labours in which he was engaged ; and, on the other, that he might be evading a duty and refusing a task laid upon him by Providence ; and hence he was determined—as he often used to say, looking back in later years—not to let himself be guided by visions.¹ He reflected therefore, he prayed, and he took advice.

Sister Maria Celeste was spared neither contradiction nor humiliation, yet her testimony never varied. On his side, Liguori gradually came to understand more and more clearly the good such a Congregation might effect, and his opinion was shared by his Director, Father Pagano, and by Mgr. Falcoia. He was also encouraged by three religious of great experience, whose advice he had asked : Don Vincenzo Cutica, Superior of the Lazarists ; Father Manulius, a Jesuit ; and Father Fiorillo, a Dominican. Not so, however, in the Chinese College, where his projects were severely condemned. Matteo Ripa looked upon Liguori as mad ; he had counted on him as a valuable addition to his community, and now he feared that, not content with abandoning it himself, the defaulter would also persuade some of the most promising

¹ Liguori's principles in regard to alleged miraculous phenomena are worth remembering. He began by a prudent mistrust. In deciding on his course of action, he leant far more on the Gospel, on conscience, and on reason, than on revelations. The authority of the latter never seemed to him so certain ; and even though really from God, they might, in his opinion, be tinged with some illusion. But, on the other hand, he was very careful not to reject *a priori*, with obstinate determination, all Divine interposition.

members to follow his lead. It may be imagined that the Fathers of the Propaganda were no less annoyed. The plans of the future founder of the Redemptorists were discussed all over Naples and were severely criticized, and he was frequently the object of very bitter reproaches and of the most cutting raillery.

He let men talk, avoided useless discussions, strove to preserve interior peace, and was careful above all to follow with docility the indications of God's Will. His Confessor, the devout Father Pagano, to whose spiritual care he had been committed as a child by his mother, considered it advisable that Alphonsus should seek other direction; he consequently placed himself under the guidance of Mgr. Falcoia, promising to obey him in everything, and to do nothing without consulting him. In obedience to Canon Torni, Superior of the Propaganda, he gave (in October, 1732) several courses of sermons in Naples, spiritual exercises to the clergy, a mission and retreat to the people. Never had his words sounded more impressive. And yet he was eager to depart. He had left the Chinese College in August, and had returned to his father's house, and here he proceeded to set his affairs in order as though preparing for death. We may imagine the tenderness and sorrow of his parents. His father went one day unexpectedly into his room, where he was resting, and, putting his arms round his neck, wept for a long time, sighing out: "My son, do not abandon me!" The painful struggle tore the heart of Alphonsus, but

did not shake his determination. So little had his filial love grown cold, that he declared at the end of his life that he had never endured a fiercer temptation nor fought a more difficult battle.

And now that on Wednesday, November 5, he and his companions took up their abode in the poor little house in Scala, once a convent, was he destined to enjoy peace there? We may be sure their hearts were full of joy in their heroic sacrifice when, on the Sunday, they sang the Mass of the Holy Ghost in the Cathedral, and solemnly consecrated themselves to their Divine Saviour, the true model and example of missionaries. Joyfully, too, they hastened to begin their apostolate by devout exercises in honour of the Blessed Sacrament and of Our Lady, and Liguori rejoiced that he could now give full scope to his thirst for prayer, and to his insatiable desire for penance. At Naples Cardinal Spinelli had shown his good-will towards him,¹ and Canon Torni, Superior of the Propaganda, had given proof of his fatherly affection. But trials were not wanting even in these early days, and harmony did not long reign at Scala. Vincenzo Mandarini, who had been with Liguori at the Propaganda, and who had brought two recruits, persisted in his demand that teaching should form part of the work of the new Con-

¹ He refused to approve the decision of the Fathers of the Propaganda (February, 1733) to expel Liguori, and to deprive him of a chaplaincy they had previously bestowed upon him, to which a considerable endowment was attached.

gregation.¹ Silvestro Tosquez was a gifted and impetuous man, whose brother filled a post at the Court in Vienna and was influential there. He proved himself headstrong and obstinate in his own opinions; and so great was the want of union that in March, 1733, Mandarini departed, with Tosquez and Donato, to found another community called that of the Blessed Sacrament.² There remained with Alphonsus only Sportelli, a doctor at law, not yet a priest,³ and a lay brother, Vitus Curzius, once a soldier.

The relations of the new Institute with Sister Maria Celeste were equally unsatisfactory. It seemed to her that its members were rejecting the designs of Providence by refusing to be guided by her visions in every detail. She considered herself bound tenaciously to defend the scheme of the rule she had drawn up, and Liguori deemed it his duty to write some severe letters to her,⁴ in which, however, his kindness of heart showed itself in such sentences as this: "You cannot imagine how much it costs me to be compelled sometimes to treat people harshly; it is my belief that gentleness always succeeds better than severity." This con-

¹ In the beginning, Redemptorists often had small schools in the places in which they established themselves.

² It did not spread beyond the kingdom of Naples. It received Papal approbation, and lasted until 1860.

³ He died at Ciorani in April, 1750, leaving behind him such a reputation for holiness that Liguori himself presented a petition to Rome that the process of his beatification might be begun.

⁴ March, 1733.

test grew more painful as time went on. The poor nun, abandoned by all, worn out with bodily suffering and spiritual trials, felt an invincible repugnance to the idea of remaining under the direction of Mgr. Falcoia, by whom she felt herself no longer understood. An attempt was made not only to extort from her a promise to cease all correspondence with Tosquez, but to affix her signature to the rules drawn up by Mgr. Falcoia; further, she was to bind herself to continue under his direction. To this last demand she, with good reason, refused to agree; and on May 25, having said farewell to her weeping companions, she left the Monastery of Scala, where for eight years she had held so important a position, and where she had paid by bitter suffering for the brief consolation of her visions. Thus she had to suffer the trial, which Liguori himself was one day to experience, of being cut off by the community she had founded; while for him the memory of one who had furnished the providential indication of his mission¹ was henceforth to be filled with sadness.

¹ Sister Maria Celeste spent six years in the monastery at Nocera and rekindled its fervour; then she founded one in honour of Our Divine Saviour at Troia, and did much for the education of girls of noble birth. It is said that Liguori once went to see her when giving a mission. Brother Gerard Majella loved to hear her speak of divine things; and when she died a saintly death on September 14, 1755, he told people that she had entered heaven, though he was far from the place where she expired. She has left an interesting autobiography, and it seems likely that she may be beatified before long.

Alphonsus's humility made him dread his own inconstancy and the temptations which might beset him, and he liked to strengthen his resolution by binding himself to God with formal promises. He had therefore made a vow, shortly after his arrival at Scala, not to leave the Institute save at the express command of his Director, and he had even pledged himself never to consent to a doubt as to his vocation to the service of neglected souls, even should he be left alone and unsupported. He needed often to remind himself of this vow, otherwise he might have been tempted to abandon a work which at the end of six months seemed a complete failure. He paid a visit to the Bishop of Castellamare, who at first received him rather coldly. Cardinal Pignatelli sent for him to Naples, where his numerous critics vied with one another in proclaiming his want of success, and where preachers held him up to their hearers as a striking example of the chastisement inflicted by God on the presumptuous. Great was their surprise when the prelate, who had been anxious only to learn the real facts, declared himself edified by the profound faith of the poor missionary, and openly encouraged him in his work. Then the tiny community was consoled by an outpouring of heavenly joy, and they thought of nothing "but to love God and to do His Will in all things."¹ They had removed into another house, as poor as the first; a kind of crypt served as a chapel, and, as they had no tabernacle, the Blessed Sacrament rested on a box

¹ Letter from Liguori, July 13, 1733.

covered with silk, surrounded with quantities of flowers. Here they would often spend the night in adoration. Liguori used to retire to a grotto¹ hard by to meditate in solitude and to perform severe penances. He was full of peace and confidence, and gradually recruits arrived, among them a young priest from the Propaganda, Gennaro Sarnelli,² eldest son of the Baron of Ciorani. Heroic souls felt drawn to this lowly community, quite unknown as it was, shaping itself with difficulty, offering no temporal advantages, promising only austerity, and directed by a founder who received postulants with the solemn question: "Brother, do you wish to become a Saint? If so, you are welcome; if not, return whence you came."

The new missionaries were soon sufficiently numerous to set up elsewhere. In 1734 they established themselves in the Diocese of Cajazzo,³ at Villa dei Schiavi, where St. Anselm lived when he composed his famous *Cur Deus Homo*; and in 1735 they were enthusiastically received at Ciorano, a small town in the Diocese of Salerno, surrounded with villages, and situated on the lower slopes of the Apennines. The entire population took part in the preparation of the house at Villa

¹ In this grotto, which is still shown, a lamp burns before the Saint's picture.

² He died in Naples in June, 1744, and was declared Venerable in 1874. Père Dumortier has written a short account of his life (1886).

³ On the borders of the Dioceses of Capua, Caserta, and Piedimonte.

dei Schiavi, including the neighbouring landowners, and Liguori gave them a cheerful example of hard work. Ciorani became the headquarters of the Congregation in its early days, and amid the joyous acclamations of the populace, the pealing of bells, the salvoes of artillery, four Fathers, mounted on tiny donkeys, entered the town to take possession of their new home.

Matters seemed so promising that in January, 1736, an application—which, however, met with no success—was made to the Government to grant them formal authorization. At the words of these apostolic men, alike in crowded cities and in squalid villages, consciences were roused, lives transformed, and souls saved.

But they could not disarm the hatred of their enemies. It invariably happens that all successful efforts against the spirit of evil arouse passion and resentment, and in this present instance to these hostile elements was added an implacable jealousy on the part of certain clergy. A novice had just left Villa dei Schiavi, wisely dismissed because his family had made an armed assault upon the house. Added to this, an unworthy parish priest, roused to fury by the conversion of an accomplice, revenged himself by persuading the local clergy that the missionaries were defrauding them of part of their stole-fees. Further, in order to rouse the people, he and his friends had the effrontery, and by a flagrant contradiction, to attack the moral conduct of Liguori and his companions; a shameless woman was even found who affirmed in a court of justice

that she was their accomplice. Complaints were laid before the authorities, and were carried to Naples. These manœuvres having failed, threats and violence were resorted to; a band of ruffians was organized, and probably bloodshed would have ensued had not the Fathers taken their departure¹ during the night of June 10, 1737. Notwithstanding that Liguori had taken part, in the following October, in a mission given by the Fathers of the Propaganda, and that in the beginning of 1738 he had preached with wonderful results in the Diocese of Salerno, all his efforts were fruitless to find a suitable and permanent home at Scala for his religious. He met, in fact, with so much opposition that at the end of August he decided to leave the little town which six years before had witnessed the beginning of his Institute. The house at Ciorani now alone survived.

II

The idea of country missions had not originated with St. Alphonsus. It will be remembered with what extraordinary success a Friar Minor had preached through Northern Italy during the first half of the eighteenth century — St. Leonard of Port Maurice, for whose beatification the Bishop of Sant' Agata petitioned the Holy See, and who was canonized by Pius IX. But to the apostle *par excellence* of neglected souls this method of preaching was specially dear. For country popu-

¹ It was here that Liguori had begun to compose one of his best-known works, *The Glories of Mary*.

lations in particular he considered it more efficacious than any other. He therefore wished his Congregation to devote itself very particularly, in fact almost exclusively, to this work.¹ He wrote to his religious:² "You know that the sole object of our Institute is to give missions; it ceases to exist if this work be omitted or is badly done." By his own example and by his minute instructions he has shown what was his conception of this work. It stands out as the most important factor in his life, and we can only form a true idea of the latter by attempting to picture those exercises of piety, carried out not only in a spirit of profound faith, such as belongs to all time, but accompanied, too, with an external ceremonial suitable no doubt to the people and the period, though not to ours.³

The missionaries, numbering from two up to as many as twenty, if a populous district was to be evangelized, spent from three to four weeks at the work if required, while ten or twelve days sufficed in the smaller localities. Missions were given at all seasons of the year, except during the intense heat between May and October, and in Lent. The

¹ He also intended his religious to give retreats to priests, to candidates for ordination, to the laity, to preach Novenas and give other simple instructions, but not to preach panegyrics.

² September, 1773.

³ Liguori himself has noted their unsuitableness to certain surroundings. Foreseeing the spread of his Congregation in Germany, he wrote: "Missions ought not to be conducted there as they are with us; courses of instruction will be of more use than sermons."

missioners arrive in humble fashion, usually on foot, at most on donkeys, or perhaps on horseback, but never in a carriage except in case of absolute necessity. But the arrival did not pass unnoticed. The clergy assembled to meet them, the bells rang out, and a procession was formed to the church, where the Fathers adored the Blessed Sacrament, prayed to Our Lady, to the local patron Saints, to the guardian angels of the parish, and of those whose confessions they were likely to hear. Either there or in the public square they at once made a short address to the assembled people. They announced that "they came with hearts full of charity to help them all; that solely for this purpose they wished to set before them those eternal truths of which, perhaps, they had hitherto thought little; and that they proposed to instruct them, and hear their confessions patiently and kindly." But this was not their only appeal. They traversed the principal parts of the town, appealing to the inhabitants in brief but stirring words; this was generally done in the evening, and on winter nights a quarter of an hour in the open air was sufficient. The presence of the missionaries was usually made known by the ringing of a little bell and the singing of a hymn. But when they found that many persons were leading scandalous lives, and were not inclined to attend the mission, they took a sterner tone. Sinners were threatened with the justice of God; the preacher would make his round at a later hour of the night, unaccompanied and without light. As he began to speak, the large bell

in the church¹ was tolled, and his voice resounded in solemn tones through the silent darkness.

While the mission was going on the Fathers were busily occupied. Frequent addresses would be delivered; an early meditation for those who had to go to work; Catechism in the afternoon for the children; a plain, practical instruction to the people after Rosary said by the women; special exercises for priests; and, lastly, an impressive sermon in the evening, unspoiled by flowery rhetoric, and delivered usually from a low movable pulpit close to the audience, between the men and women, thus enabling the speaker to speak in a natural tone of voice. The work of hearing confessions was equally laborious and equally fruitful. Liguori used to say that a priest who does not love the Confessional does not love souls, and he instructed his sons to be unremitting in their attendance each morning and evening from the third or fourth day of the mission. One of the chief objects of the latter is just this: to put bad confessions right, and to help those who find confession too difficult. To tell certain sins to a priest with whom one has ordinary (and sometimes strained) relations, in a neighbourhood where all

¹ In Italy missionaries made frequent use of the stirring sound of bells as an aid in touching the heart and conscience. The knell of the obstinate sinner was rung in the evening, while the preacher, in a black stole, cursed in God's name those who persisted in the practice of certain crimes. The custom of tolling the passing bell for those in their agony—asking for prayers by five strokes of the big bell—was one which the missionaries made a point of establishing.

are acquaintances, requires a faith and courage not always to be met with. It is obvious, therefore, how helpful may be the coming of an unknown confessor.¹ To give every facility for recovering peace of soul, Alphonsus begged the priests of the place to abstain from hearing any confessions, lest penitents should imagine themselves suspected by their usual Director were he to see them going to one of the missionaries. He also wished, for fear of sacrilege, that no one should receive Holy Communion until the general Communions. His own taste was opposed to many of the external and somewhat theatrical demonstrations common to Italian piety of that period. He forbade preachers to thunder forth excommunications and anathemas, to scourge themselves to blood with an iron chain, to burn their flesh with a torch, to twist ropes round their necks, to try to produce a dramatic effect by throwing their stole among the audience. But he allowed representations which appeal vividly to the senses and to the imagination. Besides the great crucifix and the statue of Our Lady which the missionary was frequently to exhibit and to carry round the locality, he made use, in sermons on the Passion, of a picture of Our Lord all torn and bleeding; when preaching on hell, a lost soul was represented surrounded by devils; when death was the subject, there would be a skull. He used publicly to take the discipline with

¹ St. Alphonsus recommends Bishops, in places where missions cannot be given, to send a change of confessors; to do so frequently to nuns, and four times a year to seminarists, even where the young men have been allowed to choose among several.

a cord three or four times during a mission, and the men of the parish were invited to do the same while the *Misereve* was recited on one evening, after the women had retired and the lights had been extinguished. This practice was attended by certain drawbacks. In Calabria, where manners were rough, a penitent once wounded himself so severely that he became unconscious and died. It sometimes happened, too, as the biographers of St. Gerard Majella tell us, that those who were not sorry for their own sins would unmercifully belabour their neighbours' shoulders. On one of the last evenings another ceremony took place, also for men only, and no one will regret its disappearance. In reparation for sins of speech, immoral talk, oaths, blasphemies, they not only kissed, but licked the ground, in front of a cross erected between two lighted candles. Lastly, shortly before the closing of the mission, an evening was spent in preaching on peace, and the exhortation was followed by a solemn forgiveness of injuries; if these had been public, the reconciliation was also public, and offender and offended embraced in front of the crucifix.

Marvellous were the results of these missions, and a touching story is told of the generous example given by a woman near Amalfi, who was won by Liguori's burning zeal. Her son had been murdered, and she had nourished her anger and thirst for vengeance by jealously preserving the blood-stained garments of her dear child. Of her own accord she laid them at the foot of the crucifix, declaring that all hatred had left her heart.

The missionaries preached, of course, on the four last things, and on the gravity of sin, dwelling on its disastrous consequences. But they were also very specially directed to inspire confidence in the goodness of Our Lord, and to make men feel the tenderness which His Passion reveals; the five Crosses usually erected at the conclusion of the exercises were intended to help to fix these loving thoughts in their hearts. Tannoia says: "Alphonsus wished to inspire contrition, not terror; and even when he had preached frightening sermons he was careful to encourage those who regarded themselves as unworthy of God's mercy. 'In these days,' he used to say, 'people seem to think that to be Christians it is enough to speak severely, without troubling about practising what they preach; they are mistaken. To throw sinners into despair . . . such is the method of the innovators of these times!' It was a line he detested. . . . Unlike some preachers, he did not have recourse to bitter reproaches or use terms of disgust and contempt. He was for ever saying, 'My children,' or 'My brothers,' and oftener still, 'Poor sinners!' It was thus he worked such wonders." He forbade the omission of the sermon on Our Lady under any pretext whatever, and it was usually preached immediately after the one on hell. Lastly, he required the missionaries to insist on our absolute need of prayer, and required them to teach the practice of meditation and mental prayer.¹ How

¹ This usually formed part of the exercises "of the devout life" which occupied the closing days of the mission after the general Communions.

many times must he have repeated the directions preserved in a letter of November 4, 1774: "As the missions are about to begin, do not forget this: that it means impressive sermons, instructions, retreats, recitation of the Rosary, addresses; preach unceasingly, recommend continually (I mean many times in the day) the love of Jesus Christ, and especially of Jesus suffering. I say the same of the habit of invoking Jesus and Mary in every temptation."

There were usually several general Communions. The men made theirs, when possible, on a feast-day, and its solemnity was heightened by the presence of all the missionaries, by the playing of the organ, and the ringing of bells. Fervent exhortations preceded and followed the Sacred Banquet. In the afternoon it was usual to preach on perseverance, and to give the Papal Blessing. There was also a procession of the Blessed Sacrament, and at the church door the Monstrance was thrice raised over the surrounding country on every side. The missionary finally commended himself, with all the people, to Our Lady's protection, bade farewell to all, asked pardon for any trouble he might have occasioned, thanked them for their attendance, addressed a last appeal to those who had not made their peace with God, and blessed, in the name of Our Lord, all who had assisted—their bodies, their lands, their goods, their country, and above all their souls, laden as they were with favours, and filled with gratitude for their reconciliation with their Saviour.

Within four or five months some of the Fathers always returned for a renewal of the mission, but this only lasted a very few days. It was a practice begun by the Redemptorists, and was included in their constitutions; they rightly attached great importance to it. Liguori wrote:¹ "It is simply meant to recall to the faithful the exercises in which they have taken part, the sermons they have heard, the promises they have made. Thanks to these spiritual renewals, how many souls have been strengthened in their good resolutions! Spiritual exercises of this kind will often do more good than the mission itself."

It may be asked, What result did the missions produce? There were persons then, as there are now, who averred that they disturbed the country to no purpose, or that they merely ended in smoke. St. Alphonsus maintained that they must be known by experience before an idea can be formed of how many souls are won to God, to how many mortal enmities they put an end, how many vicious habits they uprooted, how much restitution they brought about, how many lawsuits they terminated,² how

¹ Letter of March 30, 1746. In another letter (July, 1747) St. Alphonsus sets forth a reason for his missionaries to continue their help—viz., the proximity of their houses to the country places where they preached and the facility for peasants to come to them if they are uneasy in their conscience.

² The missionaries were enjoined to confine themselves to the rôle of mediators. They were not to uphold the claims of either party unless the justice of one side was absolutely clear. Similarly, they were forbidden to take part in the drawing up of wills or negotiations for marriage, unless it was a question of putting a stop to some scandal or occasion of sin.

many bad confessions they put right. After a mission given in a small town not far from Salerno, where there was a great trade in cloth, business methods became visibly more straightforward, and many abuses and dishonest practices disappeared. In 1747 an official inquiry was made before granting the request of the Congregation for authorization; the reporter had no difficulty in proving that in those parts of Calabria and the Basilicata where police supervision was very imperfect the missions helped to civilize the almost savage inhabitants, and to diminish the number of homicides, which were of daily occurrence. The religious were also looked upon as the peaceful auxiliaries of the police authorities. But they themselves were not satisfied, and did not consider their end attained unless they had succeeded in healing the secret wounds of the soul and in implanting a love of Our Blessed Lord. After their visits it was no unusual thing to see a radical change in the inhabitants of the place; licence and violence diminished or disappeared, pious confraternities were formed or revived, and edifying practices became general, such as morning meditation made in common, and visits to the Blessed Sacrament at the evening Angelus, concluded by Benediction with the Pyx. God alone knows how many souls, thanks to this apostolate, were enlightened, healed, and sanctified!

The secret of such results is not to be found in the number nor in the quality of instructions given, nor in the ceremonies which are an eloquent ex-

pression of eighteenth-century customs in Italy. It is related that, when crowds pressed round the pulpit, Alphonsus's presence alone and his venerable appearance were often enough to touch the hearts of those who were too far off to hear him. His sons, too, obtained conversions as much by what they were as by what they said. Their austere and recollected life was an eloquent sermon; they were retiring, humble, mortified in the highest degree; they accepted no invitation to dine out, except once with the Bishop; no poultry, game, expensive fish, pastry, or sweetmeats were seen at their frugal table; dressed with simplicity, in coarse cassocks, often patched, with tight-fitting collar, and rosary attached to their girdles, they reminded one of soldiers always under arms, always ready to take the field. St. Alphonsus, for instance, never shaved, and only clipped his beard with scissors. Since the regular establishment of the Institute, those who enter it spend a year in the novitiate, and devote seven years to theological studies; and all through their career, in order to feed the supernatural flame they are to communicate to others, the Fathers live half the year in their own monastery, renewing their strength by fervent prayer, solitary toil, obedience, and the practice of perfect community life. Every day they make three meditations of half an hour each, and a visit to the Blessed Sacrament; they spend three hours of the afternoon in silence, in honour of the three hours' agony of Our Lord, besides the great silence from the evening meditation until

that of the morning ; every year they make a ten days' retreat, and the monthly day's retreat is never omitted, even while giving missions. In accordance with the wish of Sister Maria Celeste, each month was devoted to honouring and imitating one of Our Lord's virtues.¹ In a word, all the rules tend to draw the Redemptorist to his Divine Model, for to imitate Him as faithfully as possible is the fundamental principle, the essential spirit, of the Institute.

III

For the space of four years (1738-1742) the missionaries owned no house but that of Ciorani, and during that period they thoroughly consolidated and organized themselves. They used to pray with the greatest fervour in their humble chapel, where the Blessed Sacrament was constantly exposed, and they vied with one another for leave to spend hours before It, by night as well as by day. There on a July afternoon,² after a burning exhortation from Liguori, four priests³

¹ Faith, hope, charity, love of one's neighbour, poverty, chastity, obedience, humility, mortification, recollection, prayer, and patience carried to the point of desiring crosses.

² Père Berthe says in 1740 ; Tannoia in 1742.

³ They were Fathers Mazzini, Sportelli, Rossi, and Villani. Father Sarnelli was detained in Naples. They were shortly afterwards joined by Paul Cafaro, who became the director of Alphonsus at the death of Mgr. Falcoia. His own death took place in 1753, at the age of forty-six, and a short account of his life was written by his great penitent. Steps have been taken with a view to his beatification.

and four lay brothers¹ pronounced their vows, adding a fourth—to persevere until death in the Congregation. Sanctity radiated from this holy centre, and many came to make retreats. Alphonsus gave numerous missions, notably at Castellamare, which he entirely reformed, and also in the Diocese of Salerno. In 1741 he directed the great mission in Naples ordered by Cardinal Spinelli, the new Archbishop, for the jubilee granted on the occasion of Benedict XIV's election to the Papacy. And yet, in spite of all these good works, he felt at times that the house at Ciorani was in danger. The Archbishop of Salerno had decided to impose a slight levy on all ecclesiastical revenues in order to help towards the cost of its erection; a storm of opposition among the clergy did not prevent the carrying out of his plan, but such violence was indeed a bad sign. There was likewise reason to fear that ill-wishers would find some way of applying the decree passed on April 9, 1740, which placed the right of association at the absolute discretion of the Government, and forbade the opening of any convent without the express authorization of the King.

Between 1743 and 1747 Liguori obtained this permission three times, and opened houses at Nocera dei Pagani, Iliceto, and Caposele. Pagani, where St. Alphonsus spent the closing years of his life, and where he was buried, adjoins the remains of the more important and very ancient town of

¹ One of them, Joachim Gaudiello, died a saintly death in 1741, at the age of twenty-two.

Nocera, distant five leagues from Naples and two from Salerno. It lies in a well-populated region, so fertile that a traveller¹ in the eighteenth century compared it to a vast garden, its roads bordered by poplars, festooned with vines; in the distance rise the smoking summit of Vesuvius and the blue peaks of the Apennines.

On the eastern slope of this range, in the heart of Apulia, Iliceto² stands on a lonely wooded height. A hermitage attached to a chapel of Our Lady of Consolation, amid these austere but beautiful surroundings, seemed suitable for the novitiate, and such it continued to be for several years.³

Caposele, situated still farther south, in the Diocese of Conza, on the borders of the Basilicata, formed a suitable centre in a wild and rocky country, which even at the present day is not easy of access.

These foundations aroused enthusiasm in some quarters, opposition in others;⁴ but nothing could check the zealous apostolate carried on by the

¹ St. Non.

² Now Diliceto, a town of four thousand inhabitants.

³ Here the celebrated Father Tannoia entered the Congregation in October, 1744. He was born in October, 1727, and died in March, 1808.

⁴ This was particularly the case in Nocera. Complaints were carried to Benedict XIV, who directed Cardinal Spinelli and other prelates to inform him about the work of the missionaries. Peace was not restored until 1748, and then Liguori obtained from the Bishop the authorization, long but vainly asked for, of renouncing spontaneously a preferment which his adversaries had vainly attempted to wrest from him by legal measures.

Fathers. After the Papal Brief of September 8, 1745, approving the missions in the kingdom of Naples, and charging Cardinal Spinelli to organize them, Liguori and his sons preached in several dioceses, especially in Bovino, Iroia, and Foggia.

The time now seemed ripe for the regular establishment and recognition of an institute which already possessed four houses for diocesan missionaries.

The King was known to be favourable; the good offices of Marchese Brancone, Secretary of State, were also to be relied upon; and Alphonsus longed to see the stability of his Congregation secured by official approbation. All the more bitter, therefore, was his disappointment, on arriving at Naples in July, 1747, to find that all his representations and entreaties were of no avail. The Grand Almoner reported in favour of authorization; but in consequence of Mandarinini's persistent efforts to get his missionaries of the Blessed Sacrament received into the new community, and in view of the existing widespread distrust in regard to religious orders and the question of mortmain, that official was led to insert such restrictions in his report that it was scarcely a matter of regret that the King and Council agreed unanimously to reject it. Nevertheless, the King assured Liguori of his good-will. In proof of this he had already urgently pressed him to accept the Archbishopric of Palermo; he now renewed his entreaties in spite of the Saint's refusal, well knowing that the men who make good Bishops are those who shun such a dignity.

Alphonsus found his chief consolation, amid all these anxieties, in the spiritual exercises he gave while in Naples. In spite of the ill success of his first visit, he returned in 1748, but met with no better result, although he made his request directly to the King, and asked only for the recognition of the four existing houses.

At this point Mgr. Villani, a prelate residing in Rome as Secretary to the Neapolitan Embassy, advised Liguori not to wait for Government approbation, but to seek that of the Sovereign Pontiff, and he held out hopes that it would be granted. The petition was well received by Benedict XIV. It set forth the purpose of the Institute, which already numbered about forty members, and begged that it might be erected into a Congregation of secular priests. Cardinal Spinelli's report was favourable; and Villani, a devout priest, of gentle, retiring character, was commissioned, in spite of his modesty, to carry on these negotiations. He found an unexpected and very energetic ally in Father Muscari, Abbot of a monastery of Basilian monks.¹ The matter moved quickly, and on February 21, 1749, the Pope issued a Brief approving of the rules of the Institute; the latter was called "of the Most Holy Redeemer,"² and

¹ He was authorized by the Pope to join the new Congregation, and became one of the consultors-general. He also taught philosophy and theology to the novices. He caused much trouble at Pagani, and when he was dismissed in October, 1751, several of his pupils left with him.

² This name was chosen to avoid confusion with a Congregation already existing in Venice—the Canons Regular of

its founder was appointed Rector for life. In the following October a general Chapter was held at Ciorani, and Liguori was confirmed in the office, which, conformably to the rule, he had wished to resign, like other Superiors ; a few additional regulations were also drawn up.

The Rule of the Redemptorists¹ was now definitely drawn up, and from this period began to be in regular observance. Henceforth they pursued their apostolic labours amid difficulties which in no way damped their zeal, but of which the detailed account would only weary the reader. On applying to obtain the *exequatur* of the Government for the Papal Brief of 1749, they learned that a process was being drawn up against them, because the King, when passing their house at Illiceto, out hunting, had been unfavourably impressed by lying tales of their wealth. At Naples, Tanucci and the Marchese Nicola Fraggiani — nicknamed "Pope Nicola," from his meddlesome interference in Church affairs—were so violently hostile to the religious orders that Liguori's personal efforts,

Our Saviour. The severity of the existing rule was mitigated in some points, especially as to the offerings for missions, the situation of houses, the number of fasts, and the reduction of the discipline to twice instead of four times a week.

¹ The form of government may be called an elective monarchy, with an advisory committee having no legislative rights. The General is chosen for life ; he appoints the local Rectors, and is assisted by a monitor, who is his counsellor ; by a Procurator-General ; by consultors who assemble each month ; and, lastly, by the Chapter, which meets only once in nine years.

supported by Branconi's influence, barely secured permission for the Fathers to reside in their four houses, and that only on condition that they should subsist on a small allowance, administered to them by the Bishop, from the goods of the community (Decree of December 9, 1752). When later on Alphonsus made further attempts to gain¹ official recognition, he had no hope of success, in spite of his readiness to concede so much on the question of owning property. "I cannot help thinking," he wrote,² "that God wishes to mortify my pride, and that approbation will not be granted until after my death." No fresh foundation could be made in the kingdom of Naples while this state of things lasted. In 1755 Liguori gave a great mission at Sant' Angelo della Cupola, near Benevento, in the Papal States, and there he established a house. After many vicissitudes, the Fathers succeeded in 1762 in effecting an entrance into Sicily, and received hospitality from the Bishop of Girgenti. Even to maintain their first foundations entailed constant struggles. At Iliceto an influential and despotic official showed them bitter hostility; at Ciorani the Sarnelli family, hoping to profit by the opposition of the Government to religious bodies, set up a claim on some property the Fathers had legally acquired; the relatives of postulants to the Congregation or Bishops frequently gave trouble; difficult characters like Muscari, the former Basilian Abbot, were a source of internal strife; Mandarinini

¹ Especially in 1753 and 1756.

² July 4, 1753.

persisted in his obstinate importunities that the two Congregations should be united. Above all, the tide of irreligion, fed by the literature and example of France, was rising higher; not merely religious orders and the authority of the Holy See were attacked, but the foundations of Christianity and belief in a Personal God were menaced, and this undoubtedly was Alphonsus's deepest grief. Besides his devotional and ecclesiastical works, he found time to compose several of an apologetic character in defence of the Faith thus attacked.¹

When we consider the incredible amount of work accomplished by Alphonsus at this period, we are not surprised to learn that in the spring of 1756 he had a dangerous illness, caused by fatigue. There were numerous missions, some on occasion of the jubilee of 1750, and later at Benevento, and other places; spiritual exercises at Ciorani, novenas and retreats; as well as a special retreat to the clergy of Naples at the pressing request of Cardinal Sersala,² who had succeeded Cardinal Spinelli in 1754. These were a few of the toils which, in the spring of 1756, brought on a severe and painful

¹ *A Short Treatise against the Errors of Modern Unbelievers* was published in 1756; *Visits to the Blessed Sacrament* (1744); *Glories of Mary* (1750); *Moral Theology* (1753); *Preparation for Death* (1758); *Great Means of Prayer* (1759); *True Spouse of Jesus Christ* and *Selva* (1760).

² On this occasion Liguori addressed a very frank letter to him about the reformation of his clergy. Sersala appears to have done little for the Jesuits when they were expelled from Naples; and he was said to be the Bourbon candidate in the conclave of 1769.

illness patiently borne. He had scarcely recovered¹ when he went to Amalfi, a place greatly needing reformation, and at about the same time he had the joy of sending some of his sons into Calabria. Old and infirm as he was, he gave a mission at Salerno in 1758, and another at Nola in the following February. This was his last mission, but he still continued to preach retreats, and yet oftener sermons, while the Government entrusted him with the difficult task of reforming the hospital at Gaeta, where hundreds of poor abandoned girls were living in ignorance, wretchedness, and dirt. One would have thought the time had come for a little rest, but fresh burdens were about to be laid upon him by his election to the Episcopate.

While Alphonsus had been engaged in forming a band of chosen soldiers to fight for their Lord, Naples had been the scene of many stirring events. The rule of the Austrians had come to an end during the war of the Polish Succession. Elizabeth Farnese, the mother of Don Carlos, was untiring in her efforts to secure the advancement of her children, and to this end she turned to account the disputes between the reigning houses of Europe. By her advice, her son had resigned the Duchy of Parma and Piacenza, and had himself proclaimed King in Naples on May 10, 1734. He then drove

¹ It is said that after this illness, which had brought him face to face with death, Liguori felt a scruple at having been sometimes too lenient in his *Moral Theology*. The third edition, which appeared in 1757, certainly shows some leaning to stricter opinions.

out the Imperialists from Gaeta and Capua, and rapidly advanced into Sicily, where Palermo gave him a triumphant reception.¹ Although the Marchese Bernardo Tanucci² was his chief adviser, and in spite of the fact that he was himself to become one of the most bitter enemies of the Jesuits, this seventeen-year-old Prince showed that he possessed real faith. His first act on entering Naples was to visit the Cathedral, where Cardinal Pignatelli gladly gave him his blessing. He was not afraid to join publicly in the singing of the Office, and to wash the feet of pilgrims and of the poor. He bestowed costly jewels on the shrine of St. Januarius, and instituted an order of seventy knights, under the Saint's name. The Princess Maria Amelia, daughter of the King of Saxony, whom he married in 1738, was of a similar piety.

¹ These conquests were recognized by the Treaty of Vienna (1735).

² He was born in Pisa in 1698 and died in 1783, and was therefore nearly of an age with Liguori. He did not use his power to acquire wealth; and in spite of the war he waged with religious orders and his hostile dealings with Rome, he was persuaded that he was not an enemy to Christianity. An illusion of this kind was not so strange in those days when the spiritual and temporal power were so closely linked, when so many of the clergy were not what they ought to have been, when the prevailing ideal of a good despot was far removed from liberalism. Liguori dedicated his *Triumph of the Church* (1772) to the Minister who never "ceased to labour zealously in the interests of our holy religion." Although the Minister was the cause of so much trouble to the founder of the Redemptorists, he considered himself his protector and deeply revered him. (See Tannoia, book ii, ch. xi, xxxix and l.)

The account given by President de Brosses of his visit to the Court in 1739 is not flattering either to King or Queen. He describes the former as of "medium height, with a long, narrow face, a very prominent nose, and a melancholy and timid cast of countenance"; silent and uninterested, he cared for scarcely anything but hunting. But Charles was not really the spiritless, indolent Sovereign depicted in these unfavourable colours. He had boldly won his crown at the point of the sword, and he knew how to defend it. During the war of the Austrian Succession, the Hapsburg forces tried to wrest it from him (1744), but he defeated them and pursued them to Bologna. Under his rule the finances of the kingdom improved, the excessive power of the nobles was held in check, and the discoveries made at Herculaneum were of advantage to art and historical science. Charles III, like his great-grandfather, Louis XIV, was extremely fond of building, as is proved by the magnificent castles of Caserta, Capo di Monte, and Portici, by the splendid streets of Naples, its hospital, and its vast opera-house of San Carlo. It was with regret that his subjects witnessed his departure for Spain in October, 1759, to take possession of the throne left vacant by the death of his brother Ferdinand VI. He bestowed the kingdom of the Two Sicilies on his third son, Ferdinand,¹ a child of eight, whose education received but scant attention, either from

¹ His eldest son, Philip, was weak in body, and still more so in mind; the second, Charles Anthony, was to succeed to the kingdom of Spain.

his tutor, the Prince of San Nicandro, or from Tanucci, the real head of the regency. The long reign of Ferdinand IV lasted, with a few interruptions,¹ until 1825; he was much beloved by his good friends, the *lazzaroni*, who called him Re Nasone, by reason of his extremely prominent Bourbon nose. He married, in July, 1768, Maria Carolina of Austria, whose marriage contract gave her the right, as soon as a son should be born, to take part in the Council of State. Eight years later she had Tanucci dismissed, just when his persistent hostility to the Redemptorists was causing them the keenest anxiety. This celebrated friend of Acton, of Lady Hamilton, and of Nelson, was an instance of the truth that in times of revolution too much reliance must not be placed upon the alleged gentleness of women. It is true that Jacobins might well appear odious to a sister of Marie Antoinette. Be this as it may, it was only in 1860 that Francis II, great-grandson of Ferdinand IV and of Maria Carolina, finally lost the throne of Naples, being dispossessed by Garibaldi and Victor Emmanuel.

Thus the monarchy came to an end, but its overthrow did not secure peace and prosperity for Southern Italy²; the family ties connecting it with so many Royal Houses upheld a great idea—which still exists—a closer union of the Latin nations. Liguori had witnessed its brilliant rise, though

¹ Parthenopean Republic (1799); rule of Joseph Bonaparte and of Murat (1806-1815).

² See Georges Goyau, *Lendemain d'Unité*, 1900.

politics engaged him but little ; and, in spite of the harassing treatment which he continually received from the Government, he was ever most faithful to the Royal Family, who in their turn revered him, and frequently sought his prayers and his blessing ;¹ sometimes even they made a personal appeal for missions.² Amid all the shallowness and dissipation of the frivolous society of the day, many probably regarded the establishment of the Congregation of the Redemptorists as an event of little importance. Yet the Royal House of the Bourbons of Naples has almost disappeared, whilst the modest Institute, founded at the same time, has wonderfully spread, and continues full as ever of beneficent activity.

¹ One little child whom he blessed was to become Queen of the French. This was Marie Amélie, born in 1782 ; she married Louis Philippe of Orleans at Palermo in April, 1809.

² Notably for the inhabitants of Resina, near Naples, not to mention the royal grants made to the work in general. Tannoia also tells us that Charles III and Ferdinand IV, when displeased with persons of high rank whom it was not convenient to treat with severity, used to send them to make a short retreat under the Redemptorists.

CHAPTER IV

THE BISHOP OF SANT' AGATA

I

IT was no easy matter to induce Alphonsus to accept a bishopric. He was sixty-five years of age, worn out by toil, sickness, and austerity, and Clement XIII was obliged to insist on compliance with his wishes. The vacant see was that of Sant' Agata dei Goti, a small town¹ between Benevento and Capua, on the site of the ancient city of Saticola, on the borders of Samnium. The kingdom of the Two Sicilies contained one hundred and twenty-three dioceses, and that of Sant' Agata was not one of the least desirable. It was near Naples, and numbered about forty thousand souls, while its annual revenues amounted to six hundred ducats (between four hundred and five hundred pounds). The Pope's difficulty in filling the see did not arise from a lack of candidates—quite the contrary; for Tannoia assures us that there were at least sixty, including some Bishops and Archbishops. The one most influentially supported was not suitable,

¹ It is in the province of Benevento, about nine miles from the railway at Dugenta, and has eight thousand inhabitants. In St. Alphonsus's time they numbered five thousand.

and the Sovereign Pontiff gladly accepted Cardinal Spinelli's suggestion that he should pass over all these aspirants and choose a priest so universally revered that they would be reduced to silence.

Alphonsus was at Nocera when, in March, 1762, he received the Pope's nomination from the Nunciature. It came upon him like a thunderbolt. He resisted, he entreated, he submitted with tears and groans, and then fell ill; but God's will being manifest, he courageously entered upon his new duties. As he left his beloved monastery, he promised to return there to die. He said it was a punishment for his sins to be thus cut off, as it were, from his Congregation; but the pain of separation was partially mitigated by the favour granted to him by the Pope, that he should continue to be General, with a Vicar-General¹ acting in his name. He went to Rome, made a pilgrimage to Loreto, had long interviews with the Pope, and in June was consecrated in the Church of the Minerva. In the following month, in spite of the intense heat of the Italian summer, he took up his abode at Sant' Agata. All were attracted by the sanctity which manifested itself in the modesty of his retinue, in his austere simplicity, his goodness of heart, his vivid faith. He was received in triumph, with firing of cannon, pealing of bells, illuminations, and shouts of joy, while he, no doubt, was thinking of the difficulties which lay before him. His task was the heavier because of the indolence of his predecessor, whose episcopate of twenty-seven years had

¹ This office was performed by Father Andrew Villani.

left the diocese in such a condition that Tannoia does not shrink from comparing it to a grave-cloth filled with vermin.

One may well suppose that St. Alphonsus proceeded to adopt all the means at his disposal to put a stop to abuses and scandals, especially those affecting public morals, for such inspired him with horror. In days when social conditions allowed of penal measures for the repression of misconduct and irreligion, the Bishop, besides the use of his own tribunal and prison for his own clergy, could, in many cases, appeal also to the secular power. In October, 1672, two bad priests were arrested, and he wrote to a parish priest as follows: "Tell everyone that it was I, and no one else, who obtained an order for imprisonment from the King; I want people to know this." He had at first endeavoured to win the offenders by kind and fatherly words, and had even invited them to his own table. One of them, a Canon of the Cathedral, who had long led a disorderly life, and thought himself quite safe from the arm of justice, was arrested in the public street. The other, one of those many ecclesiastics holding a benefice without cure of souls, had returned unreformed after five years' banishment. Violent and licentious, he brutally revenged himself on the mother of one with whom he had unlawful relations, because the former had denounced him. One night in August he shot the poor woman dead, and wounded one of her little children. Other ecclesiastics, secular and regular, were banished or imprisoned by the

vigilant Bishop.¹ Others, again, were happily brought to a sense of their evil ways by the zeal of their pastor, and applied themselves to the work of self-reformation.

Laymen who were leading scandalous lives were also carefully inquired about and punished.² Lists were affixed to the church doors giving the names of those who had not fulfilled their Easter duties, even though they were of the highest rank ; and if the culprit did not amend, the secular power was invoked.³ Blasphemers were imprisoned, since they might no longer be exposed in the market-place with a bit in their mouths, and mountebanks exhibiting tight-rope dancers dressed as men were removed ; soldiers and Custom-house officers refusing to amend were dismissed, libertines of all kinds, married or unmarried, citizens or nobles, were imprisoned or exiled, no matter how violent their anger, their insults, and their threats. Women of evil life were also imprisoned—nay,

¹ In the year 1768 Liguori dismissed fifty-two bad religious. Priests who frequented taverns were sent by him to the episcopal prisons. For those who persisted in an evil life he considered banishment the best treatment (letter to the Bishop of Gaeta, March 12, 1772).

² This vigilance extended even beyond the diocese. See letter of August 16, 1765, to a member of the Council of Regency, asking him to confiscate and burn the wicked books sold by a French bookseller in Naples ; also a letter to the King (1768) to obtain the enforcement of the laws forbidding and punishing duels.

³ In the only case related by Tannoia, the miscreant also forcibly prevented his sister from making her Paschal Communion.

sometimes whipped; and for the hardened, St. Alphonsus would fain have had this treatment dealt out oftener.¹ In fact, he wished his diocese cleared of all such characters. Outside the larger towns,² where he knew they must be tolerated to avoid greater evils, he insisted that the laws subjecting them to prosecution should be enforced. At his instance several prisons were built or repaired for this purpose, and were always ready. His Vicar-General says: "He not only kept tribunals and judges constantly busy, but he even stirred up the ministry and the Supreme Court." Writing to a newly-appointed Bishop,³ he recommended him to secure the good-will of the Governor

¹ I fully share the regret expressed on this point (in the process of canonization), by the Promoter of the Faith, who observes "that many, especially ecclesiastics, disapprove of these punishments as inopportune, and content themselves with less violent methods of reformation." But there are many other indications that society in Naples did not sufficiently respect the dignity, the independence, nor even the lives of men. Look, for example, at the decree of Charles III, who, to protect his game, forbade, under pain of death, that even a cat should be kept in the island of Procida.

² They were so numerous in Naples and so active at the time of the Bourbon accession that Father Sarnelli undertook a vigorous crusade against them. In 1736 he published a statement of the evil, and busied himself in sheltering young girls in danger, in helping the penitent, and in purifying the city. He pleaded his cause so well that in 1738 Tanucci decreed the banishment of bad women to one portion of the city—the suburb of Sant' Antonio. If we may believe the "French Traveller," who visited the city in 1765-66, these measures were attended with some degree of success.

³ March 12, 1772.

of the province, so that the latter should engage these unfortunates to mend their lives; should they fail in this undertaking, their imprisonment ought to be secured by gratuities to the law-officials. "All my income goes in this way," he added. However, another, and we may be sure a far greater part of that same income, was devoted to the rescue work of the fallen women, by providing them with necessaries (though not dispensing them from honest toil), and even sometimes with marriage dowries. He was never satisfied with merely chastising offenders, or with securing punitive measures. As to these, there are some which any Government with a proper sense of responsibility will apply of its own accord; and the rest, of whatever use they may once have been—if, indeed, they were so—have now certainly ceased to serve the purpose of morality and truth. Alphonsus's loving heart and fervent piety inspired him with very different ways of instructing, of touching, and of really uplifting both priests and people.

The six rules promulgated by the Bishop in regard to ecclesiastical discipline, the record preserved for us of his pastoral visitations, and the frequent and violent opposition which taxed his patience and courage, show clearly that he required his priests to live in a manner suitable to their high calling. He forbade play-going, gambling, and hunting. He strictly insisted on residence in their own parish, and on the fulfilment of all their duties in the ministry; they were not authorized

to hear confessions until they had passed a strict examination—a rule which applied equally to religious. The parishes were conferred on those who proved themselves best qualified, and the strictest impartiality was observed in the distribution of benefices, of which the diocese possessed a considerable number. It would, indeed, be interesting to have before us to-day the very words with which he stimulated their zeal—as, for instance, when, on the first Sunday of his arrival, he opened the retreat at Sant' Agata. Does not an echo of his utterances reach us in some of the advice and teaching which he has left us? “The zeal of a confessor,”¹ he wrote, “should go out as much towards a poor woman in rags as towards a princess. He must have great charity, especially for sinners. His interest in his penitents must reveal a father's in his children.” He adds: “Bad preachers and bad confessors are the ruin of the world”; and he looked with equal disfavour on priests who are ignorant of the truths they should teach others, and such as consider it beneath their dignity to teach Catechism to children and to preach in a simple style. “I want a priest,” he said, “to be glad to remain with a dying man, and to spend his time in dealing with a dullard, trying to teach him the ‘Our Father.’”

But, above all, his seminary—the apple of his eye, as he called it—was where, in his constant visits, he revealed all that was in his heart. He

¹ *Instructions to Confessors*, Tannoia, book iii, ch. xxx. See also, “On the Priestly Ministry,” *Selva*.

was inflexible in banishing such as were unworthy of the priesthood, and undertook personally the training of his future clergy in solid devotion ; he joined in the singing, looked to the orderly arrangement of the house, saw that the food was properly cooked, and the like ; and on feasts he would send little presents of sweet things, purchased at the fair of Salerno, for his dearly-loved children.

In June, 1766, he established a convent of Redemptoristine nuns at Sant' Agata, for whom also he was full of solicitude. It was from this community that, sixty-four years later, the first foundation outside Italy was to be made.

For the conversion of souls, beyond all he relied on the prayers and shining example of this house of austere observance and strict enclosure. He wished it to be a model to the other convents in his diocese, which he did not hesitate to describe as "abodes of cloistered women who give endless trouble to their Bishop, to their relatives, and to the neighbourhood."¹

He waged war against the frequent visits to the parlours, which introduced a worldly spirit ; this worldliness often found its way even to the chapel, where operatic music took the place of the dignified plain chant. He was no less careful to protect nuns against any injustice to which they might be liable—*e.g.*, from dishonest administrators of their temporal affairs who provided food of bad quality—and still more from the despotism of Superiors in not giving proper freedom in the choice of con-

¹ Letter of July 25, 1765.

fessors. He lays down that a Bishop is strictly bound to refuse admittance to those not called by God to the religious life ; that it is his duty "to question them in private, and that not simply as a matter of form, as sometimes happens, but with the purpose of discovering their reason for becoming nuns—whether it be by their parents' compulsion. . . ." ¹ He looked upon a real vocation as an inestimable grace, and delighted to preach in convents, especially on occasions of taking the religious habit ; and he made use of every means to keep alive an earnest piety in the souls of those who, if not fervent, are so unhappy, by means of spiritual exercises, sermons on Saturdays in honour of Our Lady, exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, and exhortations to frequent Communion.

His fatherly tenderness extended to all his children, and hence his watchful care that priests should do their duty by their parishioners ; hence, too, his zeal in organizing missions. Immediately on his arrival at Sant' Agata he had himself opened one in the Cathedral, and he took part in several others. All that we read of him proves that, unless bound in conscience to exercise severity, his benevolence and kindness were unbounded. His two remaining teeth had to be extracted, and rather than apply to a Naples surgeon he preferred to employ a barber in the neighbourhood who was usually drunk after midday. The patient bore his torturer's want of skill with heroic calmness, and

¹ *Useful Reflections for Bishops.*

merely remarked at the end, with gentle irony: "Master Nicodemus, you will have no more of my custom." He could refuse nothing to those in need, and, in spite of the prudent advice sometimes offered to him, he was less afraid of giving to the undeserving than of turning away those really in want. Often at the end of a tiring day he would joyfully set out to visit the sick; and he kept a store of ordinary drugs ready at his palace, or would send patients to the apothecaries for more expensive ones at his own cost. He would provide bedding for large families, and he used to find out and help in secret such as were ashamed to accept alms.

His tenderness and generosity were largely appealed to during the winter of 1763-64. A terrible famine, which the Saint looked upon as a punishment for the spread of irreligion, devastated the kingdom of the Two Sicilies from the month of November until the following spring. The problem of grain-supply, which for Abbé Galiani¹ had been a theme of theoretical controversy and witty dialogues, became at once a practical one to the Bishop. He made no claim to originate a new system towards its solution, but he met the most pressing sufferings by the only remedies in his power—boundless charity and the stern denouncement of every kind of injustice. His means being

¹ Secretary to the Embassy in Paris, and author of the famous *Dialogues sur le Commerce des Grains*, published in 1770. He was a countryman of Liguori, and died, like him, in 1787, at the age of fifty-nine.

soon exhausted, he sold his small amount of plate, his mules, his carriage, the precious stone from his ring. He reduced his already simple style of living, and, opening wide his doors to those in need, he said: "What they ask for belongs to them." At a time when men were trying to find sustenance in grass and leaves, he maintained that it was the duty of a Christian to be satisfied with the bare necessities of life, and he insisted on this to the Superior of a monastery who did not give liberally.

His charity was equally indefatigable in rescuing an innocent mayor from the fury of a frantic populace, in preventing a conflict with the sixty soldiers thereupon sent down by the Government, in obtaining their recall, and finally in moderating the repressive measures consequent on disturbances made excusable by the prevailing misery.

Many fell ill after such a terrible time, and Alphonsus, when making his visitations, was not content merely to urge his priests to take care of them, he undertook to protect the weak against usurers who were turning the prevailing distress to their own profit, and who, under torture, forced their debtors to sign bonds of inordinate harshness. Tannoia says he summoned merchants and financiers to him, and urged them to keep within the limits of justice and equity. He bitterly lamented his inability to deal more successfully with the famine; but it was asserted that in his diocese the price of bread remained considerably lower than in the rest of the kingdom.

Except on the rare occasions when he went to

Nocera or to Naples, in the interests of his Congregation or on account of his health, this good shepherd never left his flock. For five years his principal place of residence was Sant' Agata, until asthma obliged him to seek a drier atmosphere at Arienzo. No luxury was to be seen in his palace; he even denied himself a harpsichord, although it had always formed his chief recreation. His dinner consisted of some soup and a little boiled meat—guests were served with a second dish—cheese and fruit. His furniture consisted of a humble bed, a writing-table, a picture of Our Lady of Good Counsel, and a crucifix. There each morning he took the discipline, and frequently spent many hours of the night in reading and writing. He attended to every detail of his episcopal work with scrupulous fidelity, yet managed to find time to write a great deal, and to pray and meditate. He loved to preside at the solemn offices in his Cathedral; and most of all, when the bell rang for the evening visit to the Blessed Sacrament, did he delight to address a short and fervent exhortation to those present, and then give Benediction. He was accessible to all, especially to the lowly, the humble, the poor. A Sicilian Canon was more deeply impressed by the sight of such a life, amid the conditions of the eighteenth century, than by all the splendours of Naples and Rome. "When visiting Arienzo," he wrote, "I saw a holy Bishop of the early Church."

II

Liguori's solicitude in the administration of his diocese by no means caused him to forget his own Congregation or the general welfare of the Church, and both were the occasion of severe suffering to him. His bodily ailments were trying to a degree, but his soul, so unusually gifted, suffered far sharper pain from the mental afflictions he was permitted to endure.

After presiding at Nocera in 1764 at the General Chapter, which definitely fixed the constitution of the rules and customs of the Congregation, he urged his brethren¹ to observe them faithfully, and to renew their first fervour. The warning was timely, for tribulation was at hand. In October, 1766, he wrote: "Our enemies aim at nothing less than the wholesale destruction of the Congregation. How will all this end? We know not." Maffei's persecution of the house at Iliceto was becoming serious, and he incited Sarnelli against the Fathers at Ciorani. An anonymous letter denounced those at Caposele, and the suspicions of the Government were aroused; a rumour was spread that the Redemptorists were to be treated like the Jesuits in Spain, and attempts were made by a variety of calumnious reports to damage them in public opinion. Meanwhile, judicial proceedings were set on foot by Maffei and Sarnelli, in consequence of which Alphonsus went to Naples in July, 1767. He gained the victory by sheer force of holiness,

¹ Circular letter issued in August, 1765.

and the veneration¹ he inspired was so general that his enemies began to think it would be best to wait for his death before trying to destroy the Institute he had founded. But their courage soon returned, for religious orders were daily losing favour. The Court of Naples quarrelled with the Pope and occupied the Duchy of Benevento. At the Redemptorist house at Sant' Angelo della Cupola papers were seized and made use of, and Tanucci ordered a searching inquiry to be conducted as to the amount of money owned by the Fathers. In addition to the untiring animosity of Maffei and Sarnelli, Alphonsus had to bear the attacks of a Jansenist priest in Sicily, and in 1772 he thought it best to recall his sons from Girgenti. He endured much bitter suffering, but in the same year an unlooked-for consolation came to him in the foundation of a new house,² at Scifelli or Santa Cecilia, in the Diocese of Aquino, in the Regno. The storm in

¹ He was obliged to remain until the middle of September, during which time, with apostolic zeal, he worked unceasingly. He preached a novena for the Assumption which attracted, and profoundly touched, the hearts of men and women of the highest rank; he showed his sympathy for the Jesuits, who were in great danger, by celebrating with them the Feast of St. Ignatius; he preached to the Visitation nuns on the Feast of St. Jane Frances de Chantal, one of his favourites among the Saints; he gave instructions in numerous monasteries and to the lowliest audiences, not forgetting the chapels, which had been one of the earliest works of his ministry as a priest.

² This was undertaken by the advice of the Trappists at Casamari and with the help of a pious priest from Avignon, whose health was not equal to the severity of the Trappist rule.

Sicily soon subsided, and the Redemptorists returned there in 1775 with the authorization of the King.

Liguori's zeal for the interests of the Church equalled his solicitude for those of his own Congregation. It was to him a keen and ever-present pain to see the truths of Faith and the authority of the Pope falling almost everywhere into ever deeper discredit. He was no longer satisfied to write for directors and their devout penitents,¹ but did his utmost to refute² the allegations of unbelievers and of the enemies of the Holy See. He boldly denounced Freemasonry as a sect which would do mischief not only in the Church, but also to kingdoms and Sovereigns. "Kings," he used to say,³ "do not heed it, and they will repent too late of their fatal negligence. To-day the Freemasons are attacking the Church; it will soon be the turn of the Kings." We can imagine with what feelings he must have watched the struggle with the Jesuits; and he realized the clear-sightedness of the enemy in aiming first and foremost at a Society so specially singled out for hatred—one which Frederick II of Prussia had not inaptly termed "the bodyguard of the Court of Rome."

The storm burst forth in all its fury during the

¹ *The Confessor of Country People* (1763); *Way of Salvation* (1767); *Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ* (1768).

² *Truth of the Faith* (1767); *Vindiciæ pro Suprema Pontificis potestate adversus Justinum Febronium* (1768); *Triumph of the Church, or History of Heresies* (1772).

³ *Tannoia*, book iii, ch. xxv.

pontificate of Clement XIII (1758-1769). A kind of conspiracy had been formed in the Latin countries, and the Bourbons, who then ruled in several of them, were weak or stupid enough to give it their support. Proceedings were begun in 1759 by Carvalho, Marquis de Pombal, who ruled despotically in Portugal, while the nominal King, Joseph of Braganza, gave himself up to pleasure. Without being allowed to defend themselves, they were imprisoned and banished with a brutal cynicism, a revolting barbarity. At this sad time Liguori wrote:¹ "They are threatening a Society which, so to say, has sanctified the world, and which does not cease to sanctify it. The news from Portugal is a continual source of grief to me. . . . The account of such terrible events afflicted me as though they concerned my own Congregation. . . . Bad news from Portugal. . . . Unhappy kingdom! . . . Even tyrants question those whom they accuse before condemning them. The Jesuits alone are sentenced unheard." The holy Bishop assured Father Ricci, the General of the Society, that he loved it as if he belonged to it, and urged him to publish some refutation of the calumnies of Father Norbert, a Capuchin, afterwards known as Abbé Platel. But the slanderers found so many abettors that they went boldly forward. Alphonsus observed that men of letters considered it impossible to gain a reputation for

¹ See Tannoia, book iii, ch. xxv; and Correspondence, December, 1759, and August, 1760. Also letter of May 31, 1748.

wit and acumen except by speaking ill of the Jesuits, and that certain people were determined to believe the truth of every evil that might be said of them. In France the Jansenists made common cause with Madame de Pompadour in their hatred, and formed a coalition with the *Parlements* and the Philosophers to pursue them with undying hostility. The Duke de Choiseul found no difficulty in getting the indolent Louis XV to issue the edict of August 6, 1762, suppressing the Society of Jesus throughout his most Christian kingdom.

Amid these bitter trials, one great consolation was granted to the persecuted Jesuits. In the Bull *Apostolicum* of January 9, 1765, the Sovereign Pontiff paid a striking tribute to their virtues, and extolled the services they had rendered to religion. The Bishop of Sant' Agata was overjoyed, and wrote an enthusiastic letter to the Holy Father, congratulating and thanking him. The Jesuits thought, too, that they might reckon to some extent on the protection of Charles III, King of Spain, a wilful and headstrong Prince, though like his mother Elizabeth Farnese, who died about that time, he was devoted to the Church. Unfortunately, however, he was not far-seeing and well-balanced, and was to prove how mischievous such defects often prove. He allowed himself to be deceived by his advisers, and blindly giving credence to the lying story that the Jesuits were plotting against him, he suddenly became their most bitter enemy. He forbade any discussion, and on April 2, 1767, banished them, under pain of death, from

every part of his dominions. When notifying the fact to the Pope, he said that his motives would ever remain buried in his own breast. Three months later Alphonsus wrote to Sister Brianna Caraffa; a Benedictine nun to whom some of his most beautiful letters of direction are addressed : "I continually pray to God for the Society. . . . I do not write to any of its members, for I do not know what to say. . . . I can only adore the judgments of God, and pray and weep at His feet."

In November he was still hoping that Naples would be spared, but the decree of banishment was issued in that very month. The young Ferdinand IV had tried to resist, and had declared he felt scruples on the point ; but the Bishop who acted as his Director told him that it is the duty of a good son to obey his father, and the King of Spain's orders were imperative. Persecution next broke out in the Duchy of Parma. In January, 1768, Dutilloz, Marquis de Felino, a Minister imbued with French ideas, induced the Infante Ferdinand, nephew of Charles III, to publish an edict injurious to the rights of the Holy See. Clement XIII replied by a Brief of Excommunication, and this was answered by the banishment of the Jesuits. The Courts of France, Spain, and Naples then demanded that the aged Pope should remove the Excommunication, and as he refused, Avignon was seized by the French troops, and Benevento and Pontecorvo by Neapolitans. "Pray for the Church," wrote St. Alphonsus to Sister

Brianna Caraffa.¹ "It is terrible to see matters grow daily worse and worse. No human remedy can be found, and we must pray."

It was in these critical circumstances that the Holy See became vacant. The conclave, held in May, 1769, and subjected to scandalous pressure on the part of secular Powers, gave the tiara to a Franciscan, Cardinal Ganganelli, who took the name of Clement XIV. He was at once required to carry out the demand which had so deeply grieved his predecessor for the suppression of the Jesuits, and, instead of refusing point-blank, he tried to temporize. This was a fatal policy. His delay irritated the impatient and violent temper of the King of Spain. In Naples Tanucci became more and more overbearing; and even Maria Teresa, Empress of Austria, who had for a long time protected the Society, declared war on it in 1772, urged, it is said, by her daughter, Maria Carolina, Queen of Naples. The Pope saw no way of escape from the fulfilment of his rash promise, and on July 21, 1773, he signed the Brief *Dominus ac Redemptor*, which suppressed the Society of Jesus. Though he knew the persecution to be unjust, he thought a sacrifice might be made for the sake of peace; but neither for the Church nor for himself did peace follow; he only obtained the restoration of Avignon, Benevento, and Pontecorvo.

At the news of the Pope's decision St. Alphonsus was overwhelmed. For some time he did not speak, but his countenance betrayed the feelings of

¹ June 25, 1768.

his heart ; then he only said : " The Will of God—the Will of God ! " But when he heard the Holy Father blamed, he answered : " Poor Pope ! what could he do ? . . . Our duty is to adore God's judgments in silence, and to keep ourselves in peace.¹ If only one Jesuit were left, he would be enough to restore the Society."

The anguish and anxiety which beset the unfortunate Pontiff for the rest of his brief and bitter reign of five years are well known. The holy Bishop pitied him sincerely, and unceasingly asked people to pray for him. He did not long outlive the Society of Jesus, for he died on the morning of September 22, 1774. Now, we learn from the most trustworthy sources that from the evening before St. Alphonsus had remained motionless and speechless, as though asleep, in the armchair in which he had seated himself after saying Mass early in the day. He awoke at the very time when, as they afterwards learned, the Holy Father expired, and, ringing for the lay-brother who waited upon him, he said quietly : " I have been assisting the Pope, who is just dead."²

¹ In the letter which he wrote, October, 1774, to the Prefect of Propaganda, who had consulted him about the election and policy of a new Pope, he made no mention of the Jesuits. Still more striking is the fact that when offering his *Translation of the Psalms* (1774) to Clement XIV he praises his "splendid prudence." The words seem a little surprising, although they form part of a dedicatory address.

² Similar phenomena of bilocation are recorded of several Saints—notably St. Francis Xavier and St. Lidwina of Schiedam. (On this Saint see the volume published in 1901 by M. J. K. Huysmans.)

Pius VI was elected in February, 1775, and in the following year he accepted the resignation of the Bishop of Sant' Agata. The latter had already proffered it to Clement XIII and to Clement XIV, but had retained his office in obedience to their wishes; to have resigned earlier would inevitably have entailed the appointment of an inferior successor. He had now entered his eightieth year, and was literally broken by illness. During the summer of 1768 he had been, so to speak, nailed to a bed of suffering, and yet had contrived, in a short interval of improvement, to preach a novena of penance. In the middle of August his case was thought to be hopeless, and arrangements for his funeral were begun. Tannoia¹ tells us that he touched everyone by his transports of love for Jesus Christ and for His most blessed Mother. "Lord," he used to say, "I thank Thee for giving me some share in the pain Thou didst endure in Thy body when Thou wast nailed to the Cross. . . . I wish to suffer as Thou wilt, and as much as Thou wilt; only give me patience. . . . One hour of suffering is worth more than all the treasures of earth!" His neck was bent, and his chin had pressed so deep into his chest as to cause a wound, almost laying bare the bone. He was always obedient to the doctors, affectionate to those about him, faithful in his devotions, and ever occupied about the interests he had most at heart. He was even brave enough to joke about his state. To a priest who asked him how he got through the nights, he

¹ Book iii, ch. xlii.

replied: "In the daytime I drive away flies, in the night spiders." To another who was grieved to see his bent head, he made answer: "Do not be troubled, it can go no farther; it has reached the *ne plus ultra*." He recovered by a kind of miracle, and we are told that his improved condition lasted more than a year. It would be truer to say that he was never cured, for he remained paralyzed, his head painfully bent, and for two years he was unable to say Mass. Then he began with great difficulty to do so, but was forced to spend almost the whole day on a little bed, where he lay, surrounded by books, taking coffee by way of support, and working unceasingly, often until very late at night. He might well ask, therefore, without scruple, to be relieved of the burden of the Episcopate after bearing it for thirteen years. His last act was to order a general mission to be given, and on the morning of July 27, grieving deeply at parting from his diocese, he left Arienzo, passing through Nola¹ on his way to Nocera, which he reached the same evening. All through his journey he was overwhelmed by tokens of regret; the poor, above all, were inconsolable.

¹ He there cured a blind man by making the sign of the Cross on his eye.

CHAPTER V

TEACHING AND PIETY

I

JUST as the Bishop of Sant' Agata was completing one of his principal works, *Truth of the Faith* (1767),¹ there came under his notice a French pamphlet which greatly shocked him, and, without examining it very closely, he attributed it to Voltaire. This mistake would have annoyed the author of the *Philosophical Dictionary* even more than the outspoken letter on the report of his conversion, which he received the month of his

¹ In the four divisions of this chapter the essential and most characteristic features of so vast a subject can only be indicated: I. Christian Faith. II. Prayer and Sacrifice. III. The use of the Sacraments. IV. Religion of Love. Great profit will be derived from the devotional works of one who has been called the St. Francis of Sales of Italy (Mgr. Gaume, *The Three Romes*, 1842), and who, as Mgr. de Maulde, Bishop of Geneva, expresses it, has been made use of in a thousand ways by pious persons and publishers. It seems to us, however, that although so much has been done, there still remains some unused material. The volume might be called, *Liguori's Piety shown in his Letters*, and might be further enriched by extracts from his *Private Journal*, preserved unpublished in Rome.

death from St. Alphonsus, whose information about Father Nonnotte's¹ great enemy was scanty.

The pamphlet was on the subject of Preaching (1766)—a subject, in Liguori's opinion, quite unsuited to joking, as we see in his short but emphatic reply. The author was Abbé Coyer, a man of second-rate literary power, who aspired to the French Academy; he was not a bad priest, for the most part, nor devoid of power, though going with the stream and trying to appear modern. He wrote with that in view, and obtained a great success in his *Bagatelles Morales*, (1754).² Speaking of the Catholic pulpit, he accepted unreservedly the principles of those whom he considered his leaders, notably Helvetius: M. Brunetière³ sees in it the fundamental error of the eighteenth century—namely, that the moral progress and the entire happiness of mankind depend upon public administration. "Who is the true preacher?" he asked. "The Government. When it does its duty, I will answer for the others."

¹ Liguori highly esteemed his refutation of the *Errors of Voltaire*, and congratulated him warmly (Letters of January and March, 1778). After the suppression of the Society of Jesus he was known as Abbé Claude Nonnotte. He translated *Visits to the Blessed Sacrament* (Tannoia, book iv, ch. xlii) and wrote a preface to them, a portion of which is still to be found in an edition at present in circulation.

² He was not always as successful as he would have wished. Having on one occasion expressed his intention of spending some time every year at Ferney, it is said that Voltaire replied: "Don Quixote mistook inns for castles; Abbé Coyer mistakes castles for inns."

³ *Revue des deux Mondes*, August 1, 1902; *L'Erreur du XVIII^e Siècle*.

Nothing was more repugnant to Liguori's ideas than such a gross illusion. Doubtless it contains a grain of truth, and it would be a mistake, in order to refute it, to underrate the disastrous influence of a bad Government. Naples itself was a crying instance of its truth, and it may be regretted that St. Alphonsus did not emphasize this fact more strongly; that he seems to stand aloof in social and political reforms; that he calmly, and with no other preoccupation than to moderate¹ them somewhat, discusses practices, common in his day, from which we shrink in horror. But he is perfectly right when he tells Abbé Coyer that the most perfect system of government will never convert the hearts of men, and that even though it should appear to do so, it could only produce an external propriety, a pharisaical goodness; and later, in almost his last published work,² he shows that nations will produce good subjects, Kings will prove themselves good rulers, only under the sanction of a religious duty. He urges the latter to promote the Catholic Faith to the utmost of their power, reminding them that a Prince induces his people to live well by giving good example rather than by employing force. No one in the whole course of the eighteenth century was more deeply convinced than he that what matters before all else is the healing of souls, and that the secret of happiness is the Catholic Faith.

During the latter portion of his life St. Alphonsus

¹ Torture used as a means of judicial inquiry.

² *Loyalty to God a Guarantee of Loyalty to the King* (1777).

made it one of his most anxious preoccupations to defend the very foundations of Christianity against attacks which, to his grief, daily increased in number and violence. He wrote several works: *Short Dissertation on the Errors of Modern Unbelievers, Materialists, and Deists* (1756); *Evidence of the Catholic Faith demonstrated by its Marks of Credibility* (1762); *Truth of the Faith, against Materialists, Deists, and Sectaries, with a Refutation of Helvetius* (1767); *Reflections on the Truth of Divine Revelation against the Principal Objections of Deists* (1773); *Wonderful Dispositions of Divine Providence in the Work of Redemption* (1775). Perhaps these works do not bear the stamp of profound or original philosophical genius since they were written, too, many problems, and the subsequent solution thereof, have altered considerably. And yet, in addition to the historical interest attaching to all that bears on the religious controversies of the eighteenth century, many arguments so carefully elaborated, if set forth in modern terminology, would prove of great weight. The holy Doctor was surely clear-sighted and far-seeing when, in the time of Voltaire and Rousseau, he wrote: "From Deism to Atheism is but a step."¹ And again: "When faith grows weak, all virtues grow weak; when faith goes, all virtues go too."²

The real importance and value of St. Alphonsus's dogmatic works lies in his defence of the integrity of the Christian revelation and of the Papal

¹ *Reflections on the Truth of Revelation*, ch. iii, in fine.

² *Evidence of Faith*, part ii, ch. i, in fine.

authority, to which has been committed the charge of safeguarding, teaching, and defining it. He waged war, internecine and unceasing, against Jansenism, Gallicanism, and the theories known as Febronianism, by means of which Nicholas de Hontheim, coadjutor of the Archbishop of Trèves, sought to destroy the supremacy of the Bishop of Rome.¹ St. Alphonsus did not spare himself. In 1748 he added a "Dissertation on the Authority of the Roman Pontiff" to the first edition of his *Moral Theology*. Then followed a vindication of the sovereign authority of the Roman Pontiff against Justinus Febronius (1768); a long *Dogmatic Treatise against Heretics, so called Reformers*² (1769); three volumes on the history and refutation of heresies, entitled *Triumph of the Church* (1772); and, finally, *Theological and Moral Dissertations on the Last Ends* (1776). Even in his purely devotional works, such as the *Glories of Mary* (1750) or the *Great Means of Prayer* (1759), he refutes doctrinal errors. The thorough orthodoxy of all his writings has been solemnly proclaimed by the Church. This does not mean that we are bound to believe all the marvellous stories he relates, for some of which he has been criticized. He quotes them less as proofs than as concrete examples—as impressive illustrations; and he warns us³ that "we must

¹ *De Statu Ecclesiæ et Legitima Romani potestate Pontificis*, 1764; 5 vols. in 4to. Justinus Febronius.

² *Statement of the Definitions of the Council of Trent*, with an appendix on Grace and another on the Authority of the Councils.

³ *Victories of the Martyrs*, part i, preface.

always remember that God's power far surpasses all that our feeble minds can comprehend." But in all questions directly bearing on revelation the instinct of his profound faith has guided him unfailingly. The two dogmas defined during the nineteenth century—the Immaculate Conception of our Lady and the Infallibility of the Pope—were truths to which he was specially attached. Mary's co-operation in the work of redemption and in the bestowal of all grace was another favourite thought; and some sound theologians¹ have expressed the opinion that it, too, may one day become an article of faith.

In order to appreciate the timeliness of this recall to the Catholic Faith in all its entirety, we must remember, not only the vehemence of the attacks made upon the Church from without, but also the insidious influences permeating it within, which seemed wellnigh to threaten its extinction. The continued interference of the State in matters of conscience, the contagion of Jansenism, the utilitarian, self-satisfied rationalism, which tainted even some of the clergy, were tending to produce a diluted, unspiritual kind of Christianity. Was Abbé Coyer a solitary specimen? Why, in the middle of the eighteenth century, Maria Teresa herself, most Catholic Empress, was inspired by two Dutch Doctors, enemies of the Church and the Jesuits, to appoint a Commission for the reform of theological teaching. Little by little religious teach-

¹ See the very beautiful article by Père Bainvel, "Le Dogme et la pensée catholique" in *Un Siècle* (Paris, 1900).

ing in the German Universities became tainted with a semi-Protestantism, so that by the end of the century we find two students, Clement Hofbauer and Joseph Passerat, destined to become the most ardent propagators outside Italy of the Redemptorist Congregation, refusing any longer to attend them. Everyone knows how Joseph II, whom Frederick of Prussia nicknamed "My brother the sacristan," interfered in the smallest details connected with religious worship—what draperies to use for statues, how many candles to burn, etc. Equally busy in his invigilation of preachers, he recommended them to avoid religious topics, and instruct the people on agriculture, botany, and hygiene. We may be certain his directions were not in vain, either in Austria or elsewhere. What a lesson was given to priests who seemed almost ashamed to mention Jesus Christ by one who, even in his dogmatic writings, cannot restrain his love from breaking forth into such burning words as these: "O Saviour of the world, I thank Thee for myself and for all the faithful, my brethren, for having called us, and granted us to live in the true Faith taught by the Holy Catholic Roman Church. . . . I thank Thee as heartily as my weakness will allow, and I pray Thee to make all men know the beauty of Thy holy Faith. . . . How few live in this Faith! . . . I beg of Thee, O Almighty God, O Infinite and Sovereign Good, to make Thyself known and loved by all."¹

¹ *Treatise against Heretics, so-called Reformers.*

II

To regard the Catholic Faith merely as a speculative philosophy would be a singularly erroneous estimate. It is endowed with life, and for the support of this life St. Alphonsus clearly teaches that two sources of nourishment are essential—prayer and sacrifice.

He has been called the "Apostle of Prayer," and the title would have pleased him; he considered his most useful piece of writing to be his short work, *Prayer the Great Means of Salvation* (1759), and he would have liked it to be in everyone's hands. Prayer, he insisted, is as necessary for the life of the soul as bread is for the body or moisture for plants. It opens the soul to the gifts of God. It both presupposes and puts into practice humility, and, like St. Bernard,¹ he considers humility the foundation of all other virtues, for on it they are built, and by it they are maintained. To quote St. Francis of Sales, humility at once draws God to man; humility has been revealed in its true worth by the wonderful self-abasement of the Incarnate Word. How can we become truly religious unless we begin by realizing how small and wretched we are in God's sight, unless we

¹ See *Glories of Mary* and also *Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ* and *The Nun Sanctified*. In 1780 Liguori wrote to his young nephews: "Be humble. . . . Without humility you will never do anything really good. . . . God resists the proud, but He deals mercifully with the humble. He looks tenderly upon them and makes them His real friends."

force our overweening self-love to give place to a sense of shame for our sins, to a desire for forgiveness and help? The more a soul has received from God, the more deeply will it estimate the greatness, the liberality, of this Sovereign Goodness. Our unstable hearts are ever in danger of falling, at one moment by presumption, at the next by despair. The humble soul, distrustful of itself and full of trust in God, is protected against these two dangers. It is less liable than any to give way to temptation, and, should it have the misfortune to fall, it is less inclined to be surprised, vexed, and discouraged. "A soul too sure of itself makes me tremble."¹ Now, the humility proposed by St. Alphonsus as the principal aim of every soul is so closely connected with prayer that the two sometimes appear to be one and the same. To pray well we must be humble, and we shall never be humble unless we pray a great deal. There is, therefore, nothing arbitrary or unwarrantable in saying: "He who prays will be saved; he who does not will be lost. If you pray, your salvation is assured; if you abandon prayer, your damnation will inevitably follow."

By showing so clearly that prayer is the *sine qua non* of the spiritual life from beginning to end, St. Alphonsus has thrown some light on the ever-recurring problem of the part played by conscience and free-will in obtaining the gift of faith. He makes it obvious that the first duty of the intellect awakening to the notion of God is in

¹ Letter of January 2, 1765.

some way to lift itself up to Him, to seek Him, to cry to Him. If it turns away and wraps itself in a proud self-sufficiency and indifference, it incurs a moral responsibility which will justly be punished. The man who refuses to look cannot see, and so equally is it true to say that he who refuses to pray cannot believe. "Eternal truths are spiritual things which cannot be seen by bodily eyes, but can only be discerned spiritually. He who does not pray is blind to them."¹ The writer of these words did not claim to be a deep thinker, and never departed from a simple style, yet in them he discovers his psychological penetration no less than when he points to the slavery resulting from bad habits, and the blindness towards which every sin tends.²

From the theological point of view Liguori's teaching on the subject of prayer is closely connected with his system on the doctrine of grace, and in his opinion it solves certain difficulties unanswerable in any other theory. How, in fact,

¹ *Pious Reflections on Various Points of Spirituality*, xiv.

² *Preparation for Death*, xxii. The director who wrote as follows to a nun did not lack humour: "Ask advice in order to know and to embrace the truth pointed out to you, and not with the fixed intention of getting the matter decided as you wish" (March, 1733). And to another (September, 1767) who was afraid of ghosts: "The dead are busy about their own concerns, and do not think about appearing to us. Pay no attention to these fancies, and I promise you neither the dead nor the devils will visit your cell." One of Liguori's most devotional works, *The Nun Sanctified*, ends somewhat in this way: "Self-love is too deeply rooted in our hearts to be pulled up. Let us at least try to cut down its shoots."

can we reconcile these two things: on the one hand, the sovereign efficacy (clearly proved in theology) of graces which are irresistible, and which have not been granted to all; and on the other, God's will to save all men? For, in spite of the Jansenists, we must hold that Christ died for all men. St. Alphonsus's theory is really no more than a commentary on the clear and emphatic formula quoted by the Council of Trent from St. Augustine: "*Deus impossibilia non jubet, sed jubendo movet, et facere quod possis, et petere quod non possis, et adjuvat ut possis*" ("God does not command impossibilities, but when commanding He warns thee to do what thou canst, and to ask for what thou canst not do, and He helps thee that thou mayest be able to do it").

It was natural that one who so fully realized the value of prayer should esteem the contemplative life. He regarded it as the highest homage man can offer to God, and as one of the mightiest forces for combating evil and for helping and saving sinners. But in every walk of life he wanted the Christian to find time for prayer; he considered it practicable and indispensable not only for the educated and the leisured, but also for ordinary people. He directed his missionaries to teach everyone to pray, and not to be satisfied merely with vocal prayers, which are often a mechanical routine without the informing spirit. Prayer simply consists in the soul really putting itself in the presence of God, by talking to Him and listening to Him. St. Alphonsus does not tie it down to any rigid

method ; he leaves the soul full liberty to meditate peacefully under the eye of its Divine Master ; and he gracefully¹ likens it to a dove, which drinks a few drops of the clear stream and then raises its eyes to the heavens. Here are some of his counsels : " Find out what attracts you most, and meditate on that. Try to unite yourself to God by acts of the will, but always quietly and without strain. Read a little, then lay the book aside. When you feel yourself moved by some devout thought, stop reading and employ yourself in gathering in the fruits of meditation—affections (peacefully and without constraint), petitions, resolutions."² Affections and petitions are invariably suggested by the Saint in his devotional works, and also how to make them fruitful. Père Olivaint used to say that this teaching had made him understand more clearly the part petition has in meditation. Liguori wished for many acts of contrition and love—those golden chains which bind the soul to God. A quarter of an hour spent in prayer of this kind suffices to calm every movement of hatred or of inordinate affection,³ and he wrote : " He who practises it cannot, while doing so, give himself up to sin ; he will renounce one or the other ; mental prayer and sin cannot exist together."⁴

St. Alphonsus was profoundly convinced that

¹ *The Nun Sanctified*, xv.

² Letters of 1734, 1736, and 1742.

³ *Novena of the Holy Ghost*, iv.

⁴ *The Nun Sanctified*, xv.

without mortification¹ prayer can be neither real nor lasting, and is liable to illusions. He always insisted that self-sacrifice removes obstacles, makes room in the soul, and prepares the way for Divine Love. All other virtues follow in its train, and it must be practised by everyone who really wishes to tread in the steps of his Crucified Lord. "Can the life of a Christian be otherwise conceived than as interlaced with flowers and thorns?"² If this earth is a place of trial and of merit, it must necessarily be one of suffering. Unless we are willing to accept suffering here below, it is useless to dream of virtue,³ and much less of real sanctity. "He who loves Jesus Christ, loves sufferings." Austere lessons these for eighteenth-century Italy; and yet in that same century Italy witnessed another great champion of the Cross, the founder of the Passionists.

It is one of the reproaches brought by the enemies of the Catholic Church against her that she glorifies the spirit of detachment, sacrifice, and suffering, whereas such a spirit is not only against human nature but actually mischievous. No doubt some may judge that Liguori occasionally goes too far in his warnings against inordinate attachment to family and relatives. But it must be remembered that this somewhat rigid attitude of

¹ See *Selva*, part ii, ch. viii; *The Nun Sanctified*; *The Practice of Love for Jesus Christ*, chs. v, xiv, xvii.

² Letter of April 2, 1755.

³ For who will deny that in our disorderly nature many tendencies must be bridled, many appetites opposed?

defence is explained to a certain extent by the necessity of providing the clerical and religious life with some effective barrier against the surging tide of worldliness at that period.

In practice St. Alphonsus loved his relatives tenderly; he generously gave up to them (1770) his share of a large inheritance which would have been extremely useful to him; he took a keen interest in their welfare, helped them by his prayers, nor did he spare them his advice—often of the frankest. Lastly, so far from forgetting, he often insisted that detachment, to be of any value, implies self-renouncement and abandonment of one's own will—any other form of detachment costs but little to certain temperaments. It may be that sometimes we hear of mortifications which repel us and which take forms impossible to approve of, for asceticism, like mysticism, is open to excess and illusion. But how can we blame in substance those courageous souls who seek, in this heroic way, to solve the inexorable mystery of pain? Surely, they who face it boldly and embrace it, so to say, to prove to God and man that their love is stronger than their fear—who, regardless of their own suffering, are more tender and compassionate to their neighbours—such surely prove themselves the real servants of Our Lord and brethren to His martyrs.¹

In the life of St. Gerard Majella, the Redemp-

¹ In his *Triumphs of the Martyrs in the Early Centuries and in Japan* Liguori has brought out the striking lessons in courage which they set before us.

torist lay-brother (1726-1755), amid a description of humiliations and austerities such as to distress and revolt many minds, we read that one night, while watching before the Blessed Sacrament, this ardent lover of suffering heard Our Lord whisper with tender familiarity this word of reproach—"Pazzarello!" (Little simpleton!). Gerard, with daring simplicity, replied: "Thou art yet more foolish, my Jesus, to remain here a prisoner for me." Suffering is therefore transfused with love; it is at once its proof and its outlet. St. Gerard's holy master used to say, and we can echo: "O lovely suffering, O beautiful Love, to love in suffering, and to suffer in loving!"¹ St. Alphonsus's mortified life is not, therefore, a gloomy one.

St. Alphonsus's complete absorption in other works, as well as his punctilious strictness in regard to anything remotely bordering on immodesty, left little room in his life for art and poetry. But he was profoundly affected by the beauty of scenery, the sea, and skies. For him Nature is a means of raising discerning minds to God, and his writings often reflect this sentiment.² He loved music as a real musician loves it, and composed melodies for his hymns which long continued to be sung by the Neapolitans. One charming *duetto*³ still remains to us. But above

¹ Letter of September, 1767.

² See *Method of conversing with God* and in *Evidence of Faith, Reflections for turning Visible Things to Account*.

³ The "Cantata on the Passion" was edited by Père Bogaerts in his *St. Alphonse, Musicien et la Réforme du Chant Sacré* (Lethielleux, 1899). M. Camille Bellaigue, in his *Silhouettes*

everything did he urge on all the avoidance of moroseness and ill-temper. He practised what he taught, and was uniformly cheerful; scarcely ever was his serenity clouded save for a moment, when in extreme old age, a peculiarly hard trial came on him. He exhorted people not to be over-much cast down, even in times of dryness and desolation. His letters¹ are full of counsels such as these: "Let your heart expand in the thought of God's goodness, and of the merits of Jesus Christ. Suffer God to lead you as He wills. Have patience. Do violence to yourself so as not to look melancholy in presence of your sisters. Try always to appear as joyous as possible and be ready to help everybody: Death is nigh. I want you to meet it with a smiling face, not with tears. The God whom we serve is a good Master. Open your heart wide. We have to deal with a God who is overflowing with love; wilfully to distrust Him is senseless. Be joyful, and shun melancholy like the plague."

The fact that personal austerity is one of the most salient features in Liguori's spiritual life indicates a certain design of God's Providence in his regard. When we see one who rivalled the greatest penitents persisting, even when infirm and advanced in years, in devising for himself fresh

de Musiciens, says of it: "This duet, preceded by a recitative at once touching and picturesque, is in the purest style of music. Pathetic and brilliant, it is as lovely as a marble Pietà. Its beauty is of that Italian kind, antique somewhat, which grief does not mar."

¹ January, 1747; May, 1751; July, 1753; July, 1776; December, 1783; August, 1784.

sufferings, we are tempted to cry mercy. It is so disconcerting as to make us question why he should undergo such harsh and prolonged trials. But when it is remembered that he had to fight against the deadly rigorism of the Jansenists, and thereby inevitably incur the accusation of lax morality, at once it becomes plain why he should, in his own person, offer such an example of heroic sacrifice.

III

Liguori's ardent faith in Our Redeemer and in His Church, and his tender pity for human wretchedness, made him long to see the Sacraments more universally frequented. But with the exception of Baptism, which profits the child before the use of reason, they require for their efficacy certain dispositions on the part of those who receive them. Of these dispositions the priest must judge, and he has to do so more especially in regard to Penance and the Holy Eucharist: they are the ordinary sustenance of the spiritual life, and are not appointed for special circumstances, but form the main support of Catholic life. With imperfect dispositions they are barren of effect, while to approach them unworthily is sacrilegiously to insult the Divine Goodness. Must they, then, be reserved for the perfect, in accordance with the Jansenistic teaching, *sancta sanctis*? Very different was the maxim of St. Alphonsus, *sacramenta propter homines*—words dear to Cardinal Gousset, and obviously far more in harmony with the merciful

designs of Our Redeemer. "I know very well," the Saint used to say,¹ when speaking of the Holy Eucharist, "that the angels are not worthy of it, but Jesus Christ has designed to give it to man, to help him in all his needs." He grieved to see "the Blood of Our Lord despised and trampled under foot" by persons who pretended that they were called to restore to the Catholic Church her primitive purity, while they raised almost insurmountable barriers between souls and the fountain of grace. There were teachers, on the other hand, who required from the sinner less than is necessary for absolution. Though St. Alphonsus considered the latter more numerous than the first-mentioned, he could not admit that matters were thereby adjusted; neither rigorists nor laxists rightly knew how to use the Sacraments.

To avoid this twofold danger, to make his own path secure, and to guide his missionaries in safety, were the reasons which led the founder of the Redemptorists to draw up his *Moral Theology*. This lengthy work was the fruit of much labour, and in recommending it to his religious he said: "I did not compose it for the public nor for the sake of gaining applause. . . . God knows how much trouble it has cost me!"² Certainly no one would undertake such a task merely for pleasure; there can be nothing attractive in thus gauging the moral infirmities of human nature, or in collecting the opinions of previous inquirers. Yet Liguori inevitably brought upon himself unjust, sarcastic,

¹ Tannoia, book iv, ch. xxxiv.

² August 8, 1754.

and angry criticism. To the acrimony of endless controversies was added, above all at that period, the hostility of theological schools and of religious Orders. But nothing daunted¹ him, for he knew he was fulfilling a duty, painful as it was. And his work was not in vain. Had he not achieved it, fewer souls, not only in his own day but in ours, would have enjoyed the supernatural strength and consolation provided by the spiritual life. We owe him, therefore, a debt of gratitude.

This is not the place to treat, either at length or in brief, of the Church's teaching on moral questions, or on the principles of casuistry. Few will deny that Liguori's conclusions are usually marked by a wisdom at once firm and gentle; but doubtless his opinions are sometimes open to question, for he himself considered that he had made mistakes, and revised his judgment on more than one point. But are these views of his, which are usually made a subject of reproach,² really shocking? He is accused of sanctioning murder because he refuses to condemn those who in legitimate self-defence kill their assailants; but such critics, like Pascal

¹ He carried on a vigorous discussion on "Probabilism" and published nine editions of his *Moral Theology*, which appeared first in 1753. Its earliest edition was in the form of a commentary on that of Father Busenbaum, S.J. *Adnotationes*, 1748); the latest came out in 1785. He also wrote a *Practical Instruction for Confessors* (1755), which was translated into Latin—*Homo Apostolicus* 1762)—and the *Confessor for Peasants* (1767).

² M. Boutroux, in particular, has given them in his *Pascal*.

in the thirteenth of his Provincial Letters, confuse murder with manslaughter, which may be excusable. Again, in the case of a wife's infidelity, will anyone seriously allege that she ought to be refused absolution unless she owns her guilt to her husband when he taxes her with it? He is asking a question he has no right to put, and which, were she to be quite frank, might lead to very dangerous consequences. And this remark applies to others besides the hot-blooded *popolani* of Italy. Lastly comes the case of the oath, apparently sincere, yet saved only in form from actual falsehood by recourse, for form's sake, to mental reservation.¹ He establishes a broad distinction between equivocation and lying, and it may be that all will not agree with him. It would seem more straightforward to say boldly that in certain cases a lie is lawful, that the truth may, and even at times ought to be withheld.² In regard to equivocation, we share the repugnance felt by St. Francis of Sales, who looked upon it as an attempt to canonize falsehood. And it was in this connection that Newman declared that, with all his appreciation of the Italian character, he preferred the Englishman's way of dealing with such matters.³ But when all is said, there is little to blame save an attempt to justify a certain course, on merely formal grounds, too closely resembling

¹ He forbids the purely mental reservation, which would leave no means of discovering that there is equivocation.

² See G. L. Fonsegrive, *Éléments de Philosophie*, 1891, vol. ii, pp. 475 *et seq.*

³ Although an Italian, Liguori had personally an intense horror of untruth. See Introduction, p. xiii, note.

the more or less ingenious fictions sometimes used in Roman law. The actual conclusion, as distinct from the reasons to justify it, is questioned by none, and we all admire those who put it into practice during the revolutionary storm at the close of the eighteenth century, when they hid the proscribed and refused to betray them. Be it remembered also that in his own personal life Liguori ever expressed the deepest horror of falsehood.

In the numerous questions discussed by him he constantly quotes the opinions of the most approved casuists, and the fact that these opinions sometimes differ, affords the occasion for bringing into use the celebrated theory of probabilism. The importance of this must not be exaggerated.¹ It in no way dispenses a Catholic from using his conscience and his reason, which, generally speaking, show him his duty clearly enough. Nor does it contradict the fundamental principle that to act against an honest conviction is to act wrongly. It is meant for confessors who have to act as judges in the tribunal of penance, and who cannot always come to a definite conclusion in a particular case. It forbids them when uncertain to condemn; they

¹ It would seem as if too much has been made of this question. Out of the numerous works published during the last few years, we will only call attention to a very able one, by Père Le Bachelet—*La Question Liguorienne Probabilisme et Equiprobabilisme* (Paris, 1899). A short and exact exposition of Liguori's system was given in a Latin dissertation (1882) by Mgr. Kiss, Professor in the University of Buda-Pesth. But two contradictory tendencies, two opposing schools, came into collision on this subject.

may propose the highest course, as a counsel of perfection (and, above all, may adopt it in their own case), but they are not to impose it on others, because a doubtful law need not be obeyed. As to the degree of probability required to render a law doubtful, and therefore not binding, a number of systems have been maintained. "Probabiliorism" will have that a law is binding unless the reasons in favour of liberty are *more* probable. "Æquiprobabilism" would have the reasons in favour of liberty at least *equally* strong (but in practice, who is to decide that they are such?). "Probabilism," pure and simple,¹ allows the disregard of a law if there be solid reason in favour of liberty. Liguori's first masters had belonged to the "more probable" school; Mgr. Falcoia's influence and his own experience as a priest led him to apply probabilism on broader lines.

Unquestionably too much use must not be made of casuistry; it is wholly insufficient as a code of morals, and is full of danger if it is not associated with other principles deeper and richer. But assuredly Alphonsus never proposed it as a complete ethical code: its purpose is rather to regulate the

¹ Attempts have been made to interpret as a condemnation of probabilism a decree of Innocent XI (June 26, 1680), prescribing that the Jesuits should allow the principles of "probabiliorism" to be defended in their houses. See *Études Religieuses*, March 20, 1901, and June 20, 1902. The Church has certainly condemned laxity and tutorism. Besides, probabilists perfectly understand that the safer course must always be followed where the validity of the Sacraments or the safety of our neighbour is in question.

early stages, and make a beginning of a spiritual life which, by the use of the Sacraments, should expand into something far nobler; for the sacramental system, rightly understood, "is a means, not an end; a help, not an equivalent of virtue,"¹ and discovers marvellous sources of spiritual advancement. This is specially true of the Holy Eucharist, by which we receive not only grace, but Christ Himself. St. Alphonsus wished all Catholics of good-will² to communicate every week.³

But is it to be supposed that frequent Communion is compatible with the mean spirit of bargaining (stigmatized as dangerous by St. Alphonsus) displayed by those who aim at salvation on the cheapest possible terms? who give only what they must, and who grudgingly restrain themselves only when the risk is too great? The simple preparation for Communion written by the Saint⁴ enlarges the soul by lifting it somewhat above its selfish attachments, and by filling it with a desire of uniting itself to God, and advancing in His love. Does not abstention from Communion sometimes imply a secret fear that efforts and sacrifices will be required from which the cowardly soul shrinks? When we really long to rise above our wretchedness and to find Our Redeemer, we accept the help

¹ Mgr. d'Hulst: *La Vie Surnaturelle en France, au XIX^e Siècle.*

² Not those who live like pagans (*qui gentilititer vivunt*).

³ St. Alphonsus would cordially have blessed Père Coubé for his beautiful book on weekly Communion (1899).

⁴ Composed in 1767, and translated for the first time into French in 1832 by Abbé G——, the future Dom Guéranger.

He offers, even though His incomprehensible generosity almost frightens us. And this loving, eager, grateful acceptance has more real humility in it—that is, more real religion—than all the arguments brought forward by Antoine Arnauld and other moralists of his day to hinder the use of the Sacraments.

IV

Nothing roused Pascal's indignation more keenly or more justly than the statements which he attributed to certain casuists, that Heaven can be attained by means of the Sacraments without the love of God. St. Alphonsus certainly never deserved this reproach. "As God is nought else but love," he said,¹ "He wishes His law to be filled with this virtue. Jesus Christ, Who came to make known the law of love, has Himself given the example. . . . In the Catholic Church are found a true love of God and of one's neighbour. The love of Jesus Christ ought really to be the chief and almost the only devotion of a Catholic. To advance towards perfection, practise yourself, above all things, in Divine love. If you want to go to Heaven, love God with all your heart." Quotations of this kind might be multiplied, and the profound sincerity of their author is undeniable, even though the style may be occasionally inflated and extravagant, or may lapse into faults of affectation and insipidity.

¹ *Truth of the Faith*, part iii, ch. i; *Novena to the Sacred Heart*; *Divine Love*; *Moral Theology*.

To realize to the full his conception of Catholicity as a religion of love, it is enough to open his spiritual works,¹ many of which are deservedly well known, while others merit more frequent perusal. They sometimes exhale a fragrance like that of the *Imitation*—a “golden book,” as Liguor called it²—of which he read a portion every day, nowise sharing the views of such as despise this “layman’s breviary” of the spiritual life. Nearly all his devotional works might be headed by the significant formula St. Ignatius gives to his sons as the programme of their tertianship: *In schola affectus*—to learn how to love. Even when speaking of hell, as he does not shrink from doing, he shows it to us as a manifestation of Divine love. This sounds paradoxical, yet a reason for it may be found in the fact that the fear of hell helps man to curb his evil tendencies,³ since the terrible nature of the threat reveals the supreme value of what is at stake. However, he usually makes use of other considerations to stir up love in the soul.

¹ *Visits to the Blessed Sacrament* (1745); *The Love of Souls, or Reflections and Affections on the Passion of Jesus Christ* (1753); *Preparation for Death: Considerations on the Eternal Truths* (1762); *How to converse with God; Conformity to the Will of God* (1761); *Way of Salvation* (1767); *Practice of Love for Jesus Christ* (1768); *Reflections on the Passion: Pious Reflections* (1773); *Little Treatise on Divine Love* (1775), etc.

² Letter of October 10, 1787.

³ But is it not stretching the point to say: “Would God have been truly adored if hell had not existed?” (*Divine Love*, i).

In his treatise, *Love of Souls, or Reflections and Affections on the Passion*,¹ he tells us with what fire St. Teresa combated the opinion of certain writers who held that lengthy meditation on the Passion should be avoided, as being a hindrance to the contemplation of the Divinity. "O Lord of my soul," she cried, "O Jesus Crucified, it seems to me sinful even to think of such a thing. How couldst Thou, O Lord, be a hindrance unto some greater good? Whence does all good come to me, if not from Thee?" She added: "God has shown me that to please Him, and to enable Him to grant us many favours, He wishes us to approach Him through that most Sacred Humanity with which His Sovereign Majesty assures us He is well pleased." This, indeed, is the very way by which He has chosen to come to us and to win all hearts. If our notions of God were merely abstract and philosophical, who is there that would attain to an ardent love of Him? But having dwelt among us, clothed in our flesh, He is lovingly adored by all, little and great, ignorant and learned. Now, this manifestation of His goodness and love during His sojourn on earth was, above all, strikingly manifested on Calvary; there, then, above all, it is easiest to love in return. So the worship of Jesus Suffering, Jesus Crucified, was naturally a fundamental devotion dear to the heart of St. Alphonsus.

We know with what fervour he preached devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, and this is, perhaps, the

¹ In some translations this is called *The Clock of the Passion*.

most striking and characteristic note of his piety. Jansenists notwithstanding, he would insist on adorning the Altar with flowers and lights; his happiest hours were spent in adoration of the Sacred Host, either exposed or in the tabernacle—that tabernacle in which, whether of wood or marble, the Divine Guest remains day and night, like the flowers of the field, within reach of all, often alone and with no other homage than the lamp's feeble flame.¹ Poet² that he was, St. Alphonsus was never better inspired than in the lines addressed to Jesus sacramentally hidden in the tabernacle:

1.

O happy Flowers! O happy Flowers!
How quietly for hours and hours,
In dead of night, in cheerful day,
Close to my own dear Lord you stay,
Until you gently fade away.
O happy Flowers! what would I give
In your sweet place all day to live,
And then to die, my service o'er,
Softly as you do, at His door!

2.

O happy Lights! O happy Lights!
Watching by Jesus livelong nights,
How close you cluster round His throne,
Dying so meekly one by one,

¹ *Preparation for Death*, xxxv. See also *Pious Reflections*, xxiv, and *The Nun Sanctified*, xviii.

² Father Reuss has brought out a good edition of his hymns, with a translation in Latin verse: *Carmina Sacra S. Alphonsi Mariæ de Liguori*, Romæ, 1896.

As each its faithful watch has done,
Could I with you but take my turn,
And burn with love of Him, and burn
Till love had wasted me, like you,
Sweet Lights ! what better could I do ?

3.

O happy Pyx ! O happy Pyx !
Where Jesus doth His dwelling fix,
O little palace ! dear and bright,
Where He, who is the world's true light,
Spends all the day, and stays all night !
Ah ! if my heart could only be
A little home for Him like thee,
Such fires my happy soul would move,
I could not help but die of love !

Faber's Translation.

When a man like St. Alphonsus centres his whole spiritual life in this supreme pledge of Divine love, he is not abandoning himself to some pious fancy of false mysticism. M. Taine, in his inquiry on the phenomena of Catholic devotion, bears a striking and weighty testimony to their hidden source: "This secret is Jesus Christ known, loved, and served in the Eucharist."¹ And one of the last instructions of Pope Leo XIII was the Encyclical of May 26, 1902, in which he points to the Blessed Sacrament as the centre of Catholic life.

Needless to say, with such an ardent love of the Blessed Sacrament our Saint was no critic of devotion to the Sacred Heart. In the introduction to the *Visits* he refers to Our Lord's revelations to Sister Margaret Mary Alacoque, and quotes her

¹ *Le Régime Moderne*, book v, ch. iii.

words in one of his most beautiful meditations¹ in *The Preparation for Death*. Among the novenas he composed is one written in 1758, and dedicated to the Sacred Heart. He would have echoed Père de Gallifet's² words: "When I begin to meditate on the mystery of the Blessed Sacrament, all that I read and all that I hear of the favours received by holy souls, however astonishing, becomes quite easy to believe." He rejoiced when, in 1765, Pope Clement XIII authorized and solemnly approved of this devotion. How ardently he would have thanked God for its progress during the nineteenth century! For in 1836 the Feast of the Sacred Heart was extended to the Universal Church; in 1864 Margaret Mary was beatified; and in 1899 the Sovereign Pontiff consecrated the whole human race to the Sacred Heart.

Alphonsus's heart was so overflowing with humble gratitude for the love Our Lord has shown to men that the cold, self-centred spirit of religious individualism was utterly antagonistic to him. He used to say: "We cannot love God³ unless we also love our neighbour"; and in the Mass of his Feast the Church appropriately applies to him the words of his Divine Master: "He hath sent Me to preach the Gospel to the poor, to heal the contrite of

¹ The thirty-fifth, on "Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament."

² In his *Excellence of the Devotion to the Adorable Heart of Jesus*, published at first in Latin, Rome, 1726. Quoted in the beautiful Pastoral Letter of Cardinal Perraud on the second centenary of the death of Blessed Margaret Mary (1890).

³ *The Nun Sanctified*.

heart.”¹ In another respect, too, he shows himself far removed from the individualistic spirit. He draws largely, and with satisfaction, upon the great Catholic tradition, and delights to quote from the teachings of those masters of the spiritual life, St. Bernard, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Bonaventure (with whom theology is a science of the heart), St. Philip Neri, and, above all, St. Teresa and St. Francis of Sales. But any picture of the holy Doctor’s piety would be incomplete, or rather distorted, were it not dominated and illumined by the gracious presence of one who is above all the Saints—the Blessed Virgin Mary, the lovely Morning Star who heralds the coming of her Son. At once profoundly humble and gloriously exalted, entirely spotless and holy, the Mother of Jesus and of men, she is at once the Refuge of sinners and Queen of the sinless; having suffered intensely, she knows how to compassionate, and is the harbinger of heavenly joys. We do not wonder, then, at the glowing words in which the Saint commented² on that beautiful prayer (so irritating to the Jansenists), the *Salve Regina*. It is no chance coincidence that, wherever the truth is firmly grasped that the Catholic religion is a religion of love, there do we find a fervent devotion to Mary; the two ideas are intimately bound up together, and this is nowhere better illustrated than in St. Alphonsus.

¹ *Evangelizare pauperibus misit me, sanare contritos corde.*

² *The Glories of Mary.*

CHAPTER VI

LAST TRIALS

WHEN Liguori found himself once more among his sons in the community of St. Michael at Pagani his joy was intense, and he seemed to grow young again. "I could fancy myself in Paradise," he wrote. Music had always been his special recreation, and he sent for some of his former compositions. They begged him to write some fresh melodies. "Yes," was his reply; "a *Libera* for my approaching funeral." What pleasure he felt in using his harpsichord after thirteen years' deprivation! "It is quite allowable," he said, "now that I am no longer a Bishop." And thus during the twelve last years of his life, in the midst of trials of which no one could have foreseen the bitterness nor the length, there appear occasional respites, brief and rare indeed, which we may compare to the passing flowers of a late season. His Institute was to be a source of great anxiety to him at the end of his long life, not so much by reason of attacks from without, to which he was very well accustomed, but owing to internal strife. Yet the former now became fiercer than ever, and threatened the very existence of the work

which had cost him so much trial. In November, 1775, he wrote: "Our enemies are redoubling their efforts to overthrow us." Victory seemed almost theirs, for Tanucci had definitely ranged himself on their side, either because he was haunted by the spectre of mortmain—poor as the Redemptorists were—or that he was influenced by anathemas hurled against all Jesuits and Casuists by the stern moralists to be met with in drawing-rooms and the world of letters. The Sarnelli lawsuit was on the point of terminating in favour of the Redemptorists when Tanucci removed it from the jurisdiction of the court where it was being tried. "Bad news," wrote Liguori on January 23, 1776. "It is true that, humanly speaking, we have no hope of success, but God is mightier than Tanucci." In May he wrote more fully: "A great danger threatens us; we shall perhaps be driven from all our houses and see our work destroyed. I think of our Congregation as a little ship in mid-ocean, buffeted by the storm; and I wait for God to tell us what He destines for us, where He will at length bring it to port. If He wishes it to sink . . . blessed be His holy will!" Scarcely were these words written when at the end of October the course of events was changed by a political crisis which the Fathers at Nocera could only regard as providential. Although Queen Maria Carolina had had a son in the previous year, her right to enter the Council of State was opposed by Tanucci; he was accordingly dismissed, and his place taken by the Marchese della Sambuca.

This Minister did not put an end to all the difficulties existing between the Neapolitan Government and the Church, but he was more friendly to religious Orders than his predecessor, and in March, 1777, he obtained a royal decree, restoring the Sarnelli lawsuit to the jurisdiction of the original tribunal.¹

During this time of stress and trial it was a comfort to St. Alphonsus to think of his houses in the Papal States. On May 30, 1776, he wrote: "We can feel little or no assurance as to the continuance of our Neapolitan houses. They are held together by the merest thread. We must do our utmost to preserve them, but the fact remains that if the Institute does not spread beyond the kingdom of Naples it will never be a real Congregation." As if in answer to his wishes, two new foundations were made almost at once; one at Frosinone in the Romagna in 1776, the other at Benevento in 1777, in a house formerly belonging to the Jesuits. In establishing these communities, as well as in obtaining the Pope's approbation, the Saint was careful of every detail, even to the little presents²

¹ Liguori did not regret that the case should be long drawn out. "Time," he used to say, "is a fine fellow, and wonderfully forwards the interests of the persecuted." The case dragged on for about twenty years, and the final verdict, given in August, 1783, was completely in favour of the Redemptorists. Their other bitter enemy, Maffei, died in 1778, and his numerous children, left in a state of destitution, were generously assisted by the Fathers whom he had so harshly persecuted.

² "After to-morrow," he wrote on December 3, 1776, "I am going to commission someone in Naples to buy eight

which were destined to conciliate the good offices of an ecclesiastic in Rome.

The year 1779 was a really happy one for Liguori. He brought out an eighth edition¹ of his *Moral Theology*, in which he definitely stated his judgment on various delicate points. He obtained signal protection from God for some whose lives were endangered by storms and an eruption of Vesuvius, and he addressed the King in a memorandum which was favourably received. It resulted in a decree, issued on August 21, expressly approving the external form of government of the Congregation, authorizing each of the houses in the kingdom to have its own Superior under the authority of Alphonsus, and allowing them to accept novices. As a further proof of confidence, the Redemptorists were entrusted with the preaching of a crusade against the pirates of Barbary, a good work to which the Pope had granted indulgences, but for which the royal fleet needed financial help.

Seeing the good disposition of the Government, Alphonsus considered it a favourable opportunity to secure the position of the Congregation once for all; he hoped to obtain a legal recognition of the statutes sanctioned by Benedict XIV, or at least of

hams, as many cheeses, and a box of sweetmeats. These last must be of the very best . . . spice cake made by nuns, and other similar dainties—a cake of burnt almonds, for instance.”

¹ The ninth, published in 1785, did not differ from the preceding one.

those not opposed to the provisions of the decree of 1752, concerning the control of property. But endless troubles were to result from this step. To avoid arousing noisy opposition from the enemies outside it was necessary to conduct the negotiations in the strictest secrecy, and Fathers Majone and Cimino were commissioned to carry them on. They soon presented a scheme to the Founder, in which, as they assured him, the substance of the Rule was maintained intact. Trusting their word, and satisfying himself with a cursory glance over the ill-written manuscript, Liguori, as well as his assistant Father Villani, sanctioned the adoption of the draft, and it received the royal approval at the end of January, 1780. But when the documents were returned to Nocera there was general consternation. The *Regolamento*, as it was called, made no mention of the three religious vows, the vow of perseverance, or the authority of the General. "I have been deceived," cried the Saint; and on March 10 he wrote: "I am in danger of losing my mind. . . . The new *Regolamento*, Father Majone's work, is almost wholly opposed to my views." And yet on the Monday in Holy Week, ten days later, he sent this touching appeal to the untrustworthy negotiator: "Let us forget all that has happened. I entreat you to return to Ciorani, and if that house does not suit you, choose one you like better. Be sure that I shall love you as before; you will find this by experience."

To undo the mischief, two representatives from each house met in special Chapter at Pagani; it

lasted through May and June, 1780, and determined the essential points to be maintained. As the Government was still friendly, fresh negotiations were set on foot, and in February, 1781, a second and completely satisfactory decree of approbation was obtained. For a moment it seemed as though troubles and divisions were at an end; but out of these difficulties others had arisen of a yet more painful nature, and they grew apace. The Fathers of the Papal States, with whom Father Francis di Paola, as visitor to the houses of Frosinone and Scifelli, was associated, immediately issued a declaration of adherence to the Rule as approved by Benedict XIV, even though the Neapolitan Fathers chose to follow a Rule decreed by their King. The Chapter at Pagani had been a stormy one, and in it Alphonsus resigned the office of General, though he resumed it in compliance with the wishes of all. Pius VI, already much displeased by the constant interference of the Neapolitan Government in ecclesiastical matters, became uneasy at the reports which reached him, and on June 22, 1780, he wrote to the Fathers in the Papal States, telling them to maintain their Rule. On August 4 he released them from obedience to the Superiors in the kingdom of the Two Sicilies, and forbade them to go there; and finally, on September 22, urged by Father Leggio, he named Father Francis di Paola President of the houses in the States of the Church, and declared the Neapolitan Fathers to be no longer members of the Institute of Our Holy Redeemer. This

decision was definitely confirmed on August 22 of the following year, on the report of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars.

It may be imagined how the heart of the venerable old man was stricken by this blow, by which he saw himself, now nearly eighty-five, cut off by the Congregation for which he had suffered so much since he had founded it, wellnigh fifty years before. The fatal news was brought to him one morning while preparing to hear Mass and receive Holy Communion. For an instant he seemed stunned, but almost at once he resumed his prayer and received the Blessed Sacrament with his customary fervour. After his thanksgiving he wished to drive out as usual; but grief, when fresh and raw, so to say, is not healed by the outward tranquillity and everyday course of things around us. He could not restrain his sorrow, but burst into sobs and cried: "Help me! the devil wants to drive me to despair! Help me! I do not wish to displease God!" Later on he was able to say that at the very height of the struggle he did not think he had offended God by any deliberate want of trust, and he attributed this to Our Lady's help. In the evening, though physically exhausted, he was as serenely cheerful as ever.

The separation lasted thirteen years. In 1783 two Chapters were held. In one Father Villani was appointed coadjutor to Liguori, with right of succession; the other elected Father Francis di Paola as Rector. It must not be supposed, however, that animosity or bitterness existed between

the two branches, as is so often the case in family quarrels; the generous, loving heart of St. Alphonsus was utterly incapable of harbouring such sentiments. On October 8, 1780, he wrote: "My Fathers who live in the Papal States, do not forget me in your Masses; beg for me the grace of a happy death. . . . I have loved you dearly, all of you. Our Lord has willed this separation: may His holy Will be ever adored." He sincerely rejoiced when he heard that the dissidents were doing well and making new foundations, and when Clement Hofbauer and another Austrian were received at the end of 1784 at San Giuliano in Rome he foresaw that these, the first German-speaking members, were to be the propagators of the Institute beyond the Alps. And yet he was passing through a time of overwhelming sadness. "I am always in darkness," he said on January 4, 1781; "I have no one near me to comfort me." On December 15, 1780, he had declared to the Pope: "Never have I suffered so keenly as in these last days of my life; they have been the most painful of all." What grieved him above all was that, until the special spiritual faculties enjoyed by the Congregation before the separation had been restored to them by the Brief of April 4, 1783, their apostolic work was completely at a standstill—an apostolic work, as he pointed out to the Pope, embracing seven or eight bodies of missionaries, who for three parts of the year travelled over the length and breadth of the kingdom of Naples,

¹ Letter to the Pope, December 15, 1780.

preaching fifty missions a year, besides innumerable novenas and retreats to persons of every class. In spite of all this anguish, the heroic sufferer never by a movement yielded to the least want of resignation. He loved to repeat this prayer: "O my God, suffer me not to depart by a hair's breadth from Thy Will!" And if anyone, in sympathizing with him, spoke a word of blame against the hand that had dealt the blow, he would silence them, repeating simply what he had formerly said with regard to the Jesuits: "What the Pope wills, God wills."

II

Trials such as these were not likely to improve the shaken health of the holy old man. Though he scarcely ever complained, we can gather from occasional passages in his letters how severe his bodily sufferings must have been. To a nun, who wished to send him some sweetmeats,¹ he writes: "Do not send them; I have come to such a pass that I cannot even enjoy a biscuit." In the following year² he speaks of constant headache, and also of the armchair to which his crippled limbs are chained. When urged to go to Naples, he remarked that the invitation could not be meant seriously, when the children were crowding round his carriage to see if he was alive or dead. Again, in

¹ July 14, 1776.

² January 2, July 15, and December 2, 1777. To keep his mind from wandering, he often had to hold to his forehead a piece of wet linen or a slab of marble.

1780 he writes, "My life is one long death," and in 1782, "I am wellnigh reduced to a skeleton." Having been obliged in spite of himself to give up his instruments of penance, he feared he was leading too easy a life, and was ingenious in devising and practising new mortifications.

It is amazing that such a martyrdom could have lasted so long. Ere the hour of his deliverance, his much-afflicted soul was yet to undergo other trials destined to rend it to its uttermost depths. About the year 1784, writing to his niece, Maria Teresa di Liguori, a Benedictine in Naples, in the hope of restoring her peace of soul, he barely alludes to the innumerable scruples with which the devil constantly tormented him; but Tannoia is quite explicit:¹ "Thick darkness clouded his mind, and an ocean of iniquity terrified his heart. In everything he saw only sin, and a risk of offending God; he who had guided thousands of souls, who had comforted them in sorrow, enlightened them in doubt, and had driven away their fears, was now the sport of the devil's temptations and deceits to such a degree that peace and serenity departed from him. He had trials of all kinds—rebellion of the senses, thoughts of vanity, of presumption, of unbelief." Father Villani one day repeated to him the beautiful words of Ezekiel, where God says: "I will not the death of a sinner, but rather that he be converted and live," and he cried out: "How often have I quoted that passage for the encouragement of sinners, and now have forgotten it for myself!"

¹ Bk. iv, ch. xxxv.

None of the bitterness that can afflict old age was spared him. There was the pain of loneliness, the feeling that he was being passed over, of being treated as childish, and sharply spoken to; and then, worse still, there came the mortal anguish of losing hold upon himself, so to say—the impression that his powers were leaving him—his self-possession, nay, virtues long since acquired, and which seemed drowned in an abyss of darkness, trouble, and helplessness. Even prayer no longer brought him comfort. “I turn to God,” he groaned,¹ “and at every word I utter it seems to me He casts me off.” These tortures lasted from 1784 to 1785, a period of nearly eighteen months. “I suffer the pains of the lost,” he said to a visitor who was surprised not to see his usual cheerful serenity.

Nevertheless he continued to the end, as far as his strength allowed, in the performance of his ordinary duties and devout exercises. He was not of those who despise small opportunities of practising virtues, as if only the greater were worthy of them; these last come but seldom, and besides, how can we expect to be ready for them if we neglect the former? He would often repeat St. John Berchman's motto:² “I do not want great things; let them be quite small, provided only one is faithful in doing them.” He continued his Saturday conferences to his sons down to November, 1780; the last was on one of his favourite themes,

¹ He found some relief in listening to the lives of St. Gregory Nazianzen and of St. Francis of Sales.

² *Quidquid modicum, dummodo sit constans.*

the power of prayer. In the following June he preached to some nuns, and was presented by them with beautiful flowers, which he placed at Our Lady's feet; and in July he addressed the Poor Clares, ever insisting on love for Jesus and Mary. He said Mass for the last time on November 25, 1785; and to the end, with eager devotion, he visited the Blessed Sacrament and received Holy Communion. "Give me Jesus Christ," he used often to say. He never omitted any of his customary devotions; being too deaf to hear the Angelus bell, he begged to be reminded of it, and he daily recited the Rosary, that epitome of the story of our Redemption. He loved the innocence of children, and they in turn were won by his charming smile and gladly gathered about him. In spite of all his sufferings, those who visited him were not distressed, as one so often is when the sick, with perhaps much less to bear, know not how to turn their pains into an offering of love.

Towards the end of July, 1787, he was seized with fever following a violent attack of dysentery. On the 22nd of that month he received Extreme Unction, and on the 23rd the prayers for the dying were said. He gave his blessing in a clear voice, not only to the religious who knelt around him, but to his whole Congregation, to the Houses in the Papal States, to the king of Naples, his ministers, his generals, his magistrates. On July 28 he received Holy Communion for the last time. He was suffering terribly, and he earnestly begged that devout thoughts might be unceasingly sug-

gested to him. Some years before it happened that *The Glories of Mary*, one of his earliest works, was read to him, and he had been much pleased to hear what he had written on a subject very dear to his heart. With touching simplicity he had remarked: "At the hour of death it will be very sweet to think one has helped to spread devotion to Our Blessed Lady." In the same book¹ he had imitated St. Bonaventure in addressing to the Immaculate Queen of Heaven a bold and loving entreaty: "I implore thee to meet my soul when it is about to leave this world, to comfort it by thy presence, and to receive it into thine arms!" It would seem that his petition was granted, for anxieties and scruples left him, and his soul was filled with a wondrous peace. On the night of July 31, when his agony had already begun, he was twice observed to fix his gaze on a picture of Our Lady; his eyes lit up as though beholding a marvellous vision, and his countenance was irradiated by a smile of serenest joy. On the following day he gently breathed his last, just as the midday Angelus was ringing.

His funeral was a triumph. The Bishop of Nocera wished to have the sacred remains carried through the entire city, as a glorious trophy; but he soon had to abandon his plan in face of the determined opposition of the inhabitants of Pagani, who refused to part with so precious a treasure. The Rectors of the four Neapolitan houses carried

¹ The same request is found in *Prayers to Our Lady for each Day in the Week* (Tuesday).

Liguori's body straight from the Community House to the church, where it was placed in the Sanctuary on a low catafalque. Tannoia says that more than ten thousand persons—priests, religious, nobles, and poor people—passed before it. Every mark of devotion was shown to it, and marvellous cures were obtained. All were eager to look for the last time upon that sweet countenance, on those features so gracious yet grave, that noble forehead, and hair once black, now grown white with age, those deep blue eyes, and those lips which would never more smile upon them, but whose kindly words they could never forget. It was no easy matter to empty the church on the evening of August 2, for the interment of the Saint, whose sacred remains rest there even to the present day.

EPILOGUE

SCARCELY had St. Alphonsus's long and glorious life drawn to a close than Rome hastened to extol his merits, and numerous miracles were obtained by the faithful through his intercession. Barely half a century had elapsed before he was declared Venerable,¹ on May 7, 1807, whilst on September 6, 1816, he was beatified, and his canonization followed on May 26, 1839. The title of Doctor of the Church, a supreme honour rarely conferred on writers in these later times, was accorded to him by Pius IX in 1871.²

¹ A year had not passed after the death of St. Alphonsus before the process of inquiry for his beatification was opened, and on May 4, 1796, the decree for the introduction of his cause was signed. The decree for his canonization was signed by Pius VIII on May 15, 1830, and took place in May, 1839, at the same time as that of St. Francis Jerome, the Jesuit who had blessed Alphonsus at his birth.

² The decree of March 23 was notified to the Catholic world on July 7. On May 14, 1803, the Holy See had promulgated a decree declaring that the writings of Alphonsus Liguori contained no dogmatic error ("nil censura dignum"). On July 5, 1831, Cardinal de Rohan-Chabot, inspired by his Vicar-General, Abbé Gousset, consulted the Sacred Penitentiary, and the latter authorized professors and confessors to study and make use of the teachings of St. Alphonsus with perfect security.

A splendid commentary on these solemn and official honours may be found in the spontaneous testimony of veneration and gratitude accorded to St. Alphonsus by some of the masters of Christian thought in the nineteenth century—not to mention that antipathy, equally significant, which betrays the deep-rooted hatred of the spirit of evil to one of its most active and formidable opponents. Well remembered is that long and bitter resistance which the influence of Jansenism, Gallicanism, and similar forces opposed to the spread of St. Alphonsus's teaching, both in the seminaries and in the parochial clergy. But we must also call to mind the number of his defenders and admirers. In 1823 Father Ventura, a Theatine destined to become famous, thanked God for giving to His Church, in our day, a man able to join the virtue of a Saint with the learning of a Doctor. His supporters in France were prelates who were an honour to the Episcopate, men such as Mgr. de Mazenod,¹ Archbishop of Marseilles, and Mgr. Gousset,² future Archbishop and Cardinal of Rheims. Sufficient attention has

¹ His brother, who had been President of the "Parlement" of Provence before 1789, emigrated to Italy during the stormy period of the Revolution, and there he collected all the materials necessary to write a life of the Saint. These were used by Abbé Jeancard (1828). Mgr. de Mazenod founded the Congregation of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, to give missions in Provence, and at one time there was question of uniting it with that of the Redemptorists.

² *La Justification de la Théologie Morale du Bienheureux A. M. de Liguori* (Louvain, 1833), by Abbé Gousset, Bishop of Périgueux in 1835 and Archbishop of Rheims in 1840. He died in 1866.

not been given to the enthusiastic appreciation, as bold as it was brilliant, bestowed on him in 1834 by Dom Guéranger, the future restorer of Solesmes, yet it deserves notice.¹ And it is worth remembering that O'Connell nourished his deeply Catholic piety with our Saint's works, which he used to distribute widely. He also annotated his *Preparation for Death*.

Although St. Alphonsus's doctrine had practically triumphed in the second half of the nineteenth century, he did not cease to attract attention. The greatest mystic of that time, Father Faber,² well appreciated "our dearly loved St. Alphonsus," as he called him, saying of him "that very few have equalled him in experience in the spiritual life," who the purer and holier he was, the tenderer and more indulgent he grew.³

One of the finest panegyrics on St. Alphonsus was preached by Cardinal Manning⁴ at the Redemp-

¹ To be found in the first volume of his complete translated works, begun by the *Association religieuse Établie à Solesmes sous la Règle de Saint Benoît*, and continued by Abbés Vidal, Delatte, and Bousquet.

² May we not trace Liguori's influence on Father Hecker, himself a mystic in some respects, who had sought his vocation in the Redemptorist Institute before founding the Order of Paulists. He is truly a disciple of St. Alphonsus in his profound realization of the need and of the force of prayer.

³ *All for Jesus, passim*. A life of St. Alphonsus was included in the series brought out in 1847 by the Oratorian Fathers; and when the editors were blamed for not suppressing more extensively the supernatural element, Father Hutchison defended them by showing that this method would have completely misrepresented the Saint.

⁴ Manning: *Confidence in God and the Mission of St. Alphonsus Liguori*.

torist Church, Clapham; and Mgr. Dupanloup¹ writes of him as "one of the Saints of modern times for whom I have always felt the liveliest and deepest attraction." In his private journal of April 8, 1856, we read: "St. Alphonsus enlightens me austere." Mgr. d'Hulst, one of the clearest and most solid thinkers of the Catholic world, loved to extol the inestimable services rendered to the Church by the great enemy of Jansenism. How heartfelt was the eulogium he pronounced on the occasion of his centenary, in August, 1887! On the first day of that month, one hundred years after the Saint's death, which took place while the midday Angelus was ringing, the faithful of Naples and Nocera recited three *Glorias* in thanksgiving.

And now, at the end of a century, we may ask, what has become of the Congregation founded with so much labour by St. Alphonsus Liguori, and left by him at his death threatened, divided, insecure? Unquestionably trials have not been wanting, but, following the simile of the Saint, it has grown as the grass of the fields, which is cut down and yet dies not. In 1793 the Neapolitan and Roman branches were joined. This union had been ardently desired, and even three years previously the Fathers of the Two Sicilies had obtained permission from the Government to return to the primitive Rule. Father Blasucci was elected General, and governed sixteen houses and one hun-

¹ *Histoire de Saint Alphonse de Liguori*, 1877. Letter to the author.

dred and eighty missionaries. The outbreak of the Revolution dispersed many of the poor religious, driving them from one place to another; but in spite of this the Institute developed, especially north of the Alps. This development was principally due to the energy of two holy men—John Hofbauer, an Austrian by birth, who died in Vienna in 1820, and was beatified in 1888,¹ and Joseph Passerat, a Frenchman from Champagne, renowned for his clearness of intellect, his courage, and his zeal. He died at Tournai in 1858. The first Redemptorist foundation in France was at Bischenberg,² in Alsace; but, alas! how inhospitable a country it has proved!³ They found their way into Belgium in 1835, and in a few years Father Dechamps, one of their number, became first Archbishop of Malines, and then Cardinal; whilst in the year of St. Alphonsus's canonization, 1839, the Redemptorists travelled as far as the United States. Another member of the Congregation, Father Neumann, became Bishop of Philadelphia, and died in the odour of sanctity

¹ St. Clement Hofbauer was canonized by Pius X in 1909.
—*Translator's note.*

² Father Gratry had been there for some months before the Redemptorists were expelled in 1830, and he writes in his *Souvenirs de Jeunesse*: "I was never so happy as while I was at Bischenberg. Externally everything was poor and bare, but I lived a truly interior life."

³ Just as this book is finished (November, 1902) the French Government have placed on their list of unauthorized Congregations the Redemptorists and their nineteen houses.

in 1860. Pius IX, in his affectionate solicitude, decided that the mother-house was to be in Rome, and it was therefore established in 1854 in the Villa Caserta, where, shortly afterwards, the miraculous picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour was discovered. The Neapolitan Fathers did not become entirely subject to the General until 1869; it was deemed more prudent not to bring them into prominence, for fear of clashing with the claims of the Government.

In 1895 the Institute of Our Most Holy Redeemer comprised twelve provinces, one hundred and forty-five houses, and two thousand seven hundred and eighty-eight members;¹ and since then Toronto, in the region of the Great Lakes, was erected into a vice-province in 1897, and Ireland into a separate province, with jurisdiction over Australia (1898). Thus we see how this religious family, founded by St. Alphonsus, prospers and carries his work into all quarters of the globe.

This work is carried on no less efficaciously by the spread of his moral theology. By vindicating in the Church the principles of a moderate system of Probabilism in the Confessional, not only did he give to many a soul of his own time easy access to the Sacraments, but he has established a permanent

¹ As to the Redemptoristines, in 1897 they possessed three Italian and fifteen other convents, comprising four in Belgium, three in Austria, two in France, one in Ireland, and one in London. *Del secondo centenario dalla nascita di Sant' Alfonso Maria di Liguori*, Roma, 1896.

safeguard against the adoption of an unwise rigour by directors. In fact, even if, in the regulation of one's own conduct, it would be dangerous to content oneself easily with probable opinions, and still more not to examine one's conscience carefully, yet the principle that a confessor may not bind his penitent to observe an uncertain law must be looked upon as finally established and irrefragable, and that in spite of controversies which it would be wrong to prolong or revive. This is the main thesis which St. Alphonsus so triumphantly vindicated, and he used to tell his adversaries that he should hold himself guilty of grave sin did he adopt a different method in judging others. He loved to repeat the beautiful saying of St. John Chrysostom, and it reveals his own soul: "Be severe towards thyself, and indulgent to thy neighbour."¹

Liguori's beneficent influence has made itself felt to an extent difficult to grasp. How could his missionaries have even attempted the work of preserving the Catholic Faith in so many towns and villages, had not his teaching succeeded in overcoming the senseless and disheartening requirements imposed on the reception of the Sacraments and the practice of religion by Jansenism and routine? May we not consider that to his apostolate France owes the great increase of the excellent work of giving missions in country dis-

¹ "Circa vitam tuam esto austerus, circa alienam benignus." *Apologia* (1769), in fine.

tricts? How much truly evangelical preaching may be traced to his influence? And, besides, are not the chief developments of Catholic devotion in the nineteenth century due to the real love of prayer which is one of the Saint's principal characteristics? May we not even go farther? He who brought back piety to its true source has thus restored devotion to the Saints, as well as taste for their history and an appreciation for their legends and mystical works.

The Church, in one of her Lenten Masses,¹ has taken a beautiful text from the prophet Isaias, which may well be applied to St. Alphonsus: "*When thou shalt pour out thy soul to the hungry, and shalt satisfy the afflicted soul, then shall thy light rise up in darkness, and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a fountain of water whose waters shall not fail.*" And St. Alphonsus's life-work further illustrates that principle of charity, the greatness of which, says Pascal,² surpasses all greatness of mind or body, being in an infinitely higher order. Here must be sought the sublimest lesson he gives us. Throughout the numerous writings left by this Doctor of the Church the thought which is ever freshest and most powerful for good is charity. What, above all, stands most clearly revealed in that humble and tender soul, who felt even more than he was able to express, is the fact that the way to God lies through the heart rather than through the

¹ Saturday after Ash Wednesday: Roman Missal.

² *Pensées*, xvii 1.

intellect; that the highest benefit we can bestow on others is to teach them that God loves them, and to love them ourselves; that there lies latent in holiness as such—that is to say, in the heroic love of God and man—an extraordinary force, which is a providential safeguard to the Church, and this force is the means, under Providence, by which she triumphs over the difficulties, the hostility, and the opposition raised against her.

Thus Liguori, above all petty controversies and narrowness of schools, will appeal to minds differing widely in ideas and tendencies, and trained in an environment quite other than that of Southern Italy at the decline of the *ancien régime*. He is one of the lasting treasures of our moral inheritance. Even before Newman's genius had so brilliantly set forth the idea of the development of Christianity, Dom Guéranger, author of the *Liturgical Year*, and one of the stoutest defenders of the unchangeableness of the Catholic Faith, had called attention to this point when speaking of the founder of the Redemptorists. Now, this idea does not refer only to the future; it is also closely connected with the lasting work done in the past. Whatever, therefore, is to come, be it what we desire or what we dread, the Saint who, despite the hostility of his age, upheld the pure tradition of Faith and of Catholic piety, who throughout his long life and since his death has so largely aided in freeing religious life from the evils of Jansenism, who has taught and will continue to teach so many

souls a deeper love of their Crucified Lord present in the Blessed Sacrament, and of His holy Mother—he assuredly will retain a place of honour among the chosen of the human race and in the Church of Jesus Christ.

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